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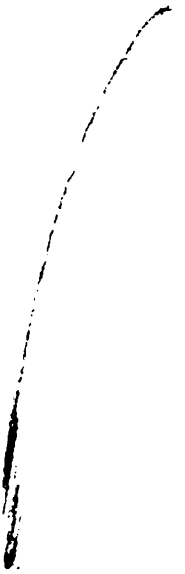



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AN AVERAGE WOMAN

W. DANE BANK



AN AVERAGE WOMAN

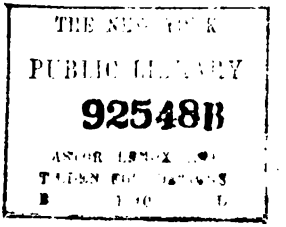
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AUTHOR OF "JAMES," "TREASURE," ETC.

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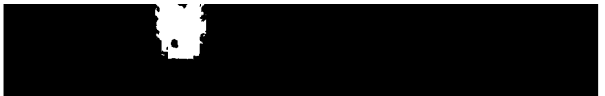
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PART ONE: THE DAZZLING MAID



AN AVERAGE WOMAN

PART ONE: THE DAZZLING MAID

CHAPTER I

"EMMIE BOLLINS fancies herself," said Lizzie Smaile.

And Lizzie was probably not far from the truth. The phrase too is illuminating. Emmie "fancied" herself in more ways than one, and in more situations than one if the truth were known. Emmie "fancied" herself to this extent: she considered herself superior (the real superiority not very clearly defined) to the other occupants of the trimming-room. Superior is not quite the exact word. Emmie knew she did not speak "so refined" as Miss Black, who said "Yes" with a mince and not "Ay" and never indulged in the Lancashire dialect. And yet Emmie was capable of shaking her head and saying "Miss Black" . . . and feeling she didn't care a brass farthing for Miss Black. Who was Miss Black if er . . . if chaps were about, eh? Miss Black could say "Yes" and "No" and "It's a very nice day, is it not?" in a style that was probably very proper and all that, but she was forty if she was a day. . . . Not much good her "It's a very nice day, is it not?" (Imagine this being said in a very prisms and prunes manner) had done her! No, Emmie refused to concede anything of vital importance to Miss Black.

There were, of course, others in the trimming-room who were full of importance in their way, but Emmie had that same feeling — she didn't care for any of them. The phrase must not be taken too literally: it must be treated indulgently and understood as an attitude, for Emmie had a heart and cared for Miss Black, for instance, as well as for Lizzie Smaile and others.

Who can understand the pretty girl? Herself least of all.

Emmie *was* pretty. Some praised her extravagantly; others merely said, "Yes . . . all right"— opinions differ. But nobody suggested she approached ugliness. Also she had a tongue which is valuable in anybody's mouth, but almost an unfair advantage in the head of a pretty woman. Emmie's tongue was mostly of the defensive kind. She could hit back, defend herself with it, use it as a weapon for trench warfare, but could indulge in "grenade" work if pushed to it.

Emmie in a shawl, which she wore occasionally going to and from work: Emmie in clogs, which she wore only on very dirty and bad days, was not to be passed over as of no or little account; but the Emmie who was dressed in her Sunday best was as likely to attract attention as anybody in Ganton.

Emmie's hair was black and her eyes a fine rich brown, though the colour was not all at first glance. She had a way of letting you see only half her eyes to begin with, as if she were shy and looked at you cautiously, or as if there was something to be hidden till she was sure who looked. Her black brows, well marked, seemed to protect these modest looking eyes a little, and then some pertinacity on the part of the male or a little more confidence (or maybe feminine armoury) on Emmie's part and the lids were fully raised while the brown eyes blazed

or signalled a wealth of something attractive. Emmie had seen more than one man mutter as these lids of hers went up and the eyes were glorious as Psyche at her bath. Her nose was inclined to the snub, but it looked pretty and became her, for she had a neat, shapely mouth and her face was beautifully rounded about her chin, which was full and told its affectionate tale.

Emmie had had many admirers. Shapers, body makers, finishers, men from the warehouse and men who had no connection with hatting at all. Emmie was not afraid to talk to a stranger or to walk with him, for that matter. She had picked up many strangers, or been picked up would be politer, perhaps, on her Saturday evening excursions to Hyde or Ashton or Manchester, but she walked out with nobody officially or possessedly.

"Goin' out with that there chap as you were with last Sat'dy?" asked Alice Cannel, Emmie's friend.

"No fear. Had enough of him."

"You soon have enough of 'em."

"Well, *that* chap! . . ."

"It's always that chap."

Emmie laughed. As she laughed she felt inside her a chuckle of keen satisfaction. It was as if she were confident she would make a fool of herself if she got really tied to any of these young men she met on Saturday night. The feeling was the note of satisfaction she carried with her — satisfaction plus a fair amount of joyousness. She was pretty; she attracted; she felt her power: why should she get married in a hurry?

"You'll get caught one of these days," said Alice.

"Shall I?"

The note was one of absolute self-confidence.

"You will that," Alice laughed. "Head o'er heels too, ah'll bet, when it does happen."

"Shove *him* head over heels more like."

"Oh . . . ay."

"Well, I'm not caught yet, am I?"

"You say not. What about Ted Bromley?"

"*Him*. . . ." Emmie flared.

"Oh! You needn't look so fierce. . . . You were laughin' an' carryin' on at Ashton t'other week."

"Ted Bromley." Emmie shook herself.

"What's up with him?" Alice asked.

"Up with him? . . . I don't know what's up with him: he can go up to Jericho for all I care: I know that's up with him. . . . Ted Bromley. . . ." She shook herself. "I wouldn't have him if I were thirty and squinted."

Alice laughed.

"You and your thirty and squints. . . . You wait. . . . You wait. . . ."

"I'll wait right enough."

But Emmie knew she had in her that which did not desire to wait too long. She liked men, liked to be near them and with them, note their admiration of her and feel the influence she had on them. She might scorn Ted Bromley as a husband, but she was pleased on occasions to get his mead of homage.

There were moments when she felt a little afraid of the future. But almost immediately she would assure herself with the thought: I can take care of myself. She felt that instinctively and strongly. And yet. . . . But she had no fear. Even if she liked men and greatly desired affection, she also had a level head and a sense of duty. She worked well, earned an excellent wage and helped her mother at home. But she must indulge herself.

What was life if you didn't enjoy yourself? She was

going to enjoy herself. Nice chance she'd have after she was married. . . .

Married? . . . Ted Bromley. . . . He was a body-maker. . . . No fear. She'd rather have that chap who was in a warehouse in Manchester that she met at Belle Vue once. He was all right . . . dressed well and talked well. But she was certainly not going to have a body-maker like Ted Bromley. She could do better than that. But she wasn't going to marry anybody yet. . . . Not yet. . . .

She looked at herself in the glass. The black hair shone in its fine thick folds; the black eyebrows covered those quizzing eyes. She only looked at herself curiously to begin with. Then she raised her head with a jerk, opened her eyes wide, remarked the beautiful line of her round chin and the beautiful shape and colour of her neck. . . .

She looked a trifle disdainful; certainly satisfied.

It was as if she said, "Am I, with this face, to marry Ted Bromley?" She said, of course, nothing of the kind; but the feeling was there.

Emmie Bollins worked as a trimmer at T. Booke & Son's. She was a quick worker and was able in good times to earn thirty shillings a week — even more if she cared to sit up late, for in this year, 1885, trimmers were allowed to take hats to their homes and work at them there. Legislation has practically put an end to that, and incidentally made many a home in Ganton much less untidy and uncomfortable.

The trimming-room at "Booke's" was a fairly large one, sufficient to accommodate about sixty workers, though as a rule there were generally not more than forty there. There were eight tables in the room, and the

trimmers sat four on each side. They used to have the work handed to them by the "giver-out"; that is to say, the hat with nothing sewn on it was passed to the trimmer with the necessary trimmings — band and binding to go respectively round the crown and brim, and the leather and lining (if a lined hat) for the inside. As a rule the hats would be given out by the half dozen; occasionally a trimmer might get more, generally less. She took them to the workroom, sat at her place and began her work.

The lining, which was a strip of silk and a flat piece, generally stamped with the name of the retailer so that his advertisement should be carried by the wearer wherever the hat went, was put together with needle and thread, some paper and paste. The leather was cut so that it would just fit the hat and was then laboriously sewn in with even stitches, having a piece of whipcord at the top to give it more neatness. The leather is put in with less trouble nowadays, as the whipcord is attached first by machine.

The needle made a click as it went through the stiff felt of the hat, and one could tell the speed at which a trimmer worked by the almost rhythmical sound of the stitch.

When the hats were trimmed they were taken to the forewoman or giver-out, who examined them to see that the work had been properly done; that the bow on the band was in the correct place, the binding neatly sewn, or the stitches in the leather were regular and close — not a few together and then a gap and then another crowd, and so on — and the lining well made, the stamp in the centre, etc. If all was well the trimmer was credited in her book with the amount she had earned, and given fresh work if there was fresh work to be done. If the work was badly done it was handed back to be

done again, and trimmers did not like, any more than other people, to do their work twice.

One can see that these women and girls on piece work might earn much or little, according to their capacity. A poor worker was no good at all, for she took up space in the trimming-room and might keep work back in busy times. Generally the trimmers were happy. They had their freedom and they earned very fair wages — an excellent combination in a woman worker's eyes. Moreover, there was no restraint on tongues in the trimming-room; also a consideration. Sometimes laughter pealed from it, till Miss Frisby, the "giver-out," feeling wildly curious to know what it was all about, and also a little jealous that she was out of it, would be inclined to go upstairs and tell them to make less noise, only if she did that she was afraid she might not get to know the cause of the laughter, and so used to wait till the next trimmer came down.

"Somebody's laughing upstairs," she would say.

"Oh. . . ."

"Er. . . . What is it?"

"It's Emmie Bollins and Alice Cannel."

"Those two. . . ." She wondered why on earth the trimmer couldn't tell her the tale.

"They've been telling us about two chaps they met at Ashton, an' promised to meet again — and never went."

"T't! T't! T't! Miss Frisby looked properly shocked.

"Alice said her chap was dressed up to the nines, an' wanted to come an' see her home. But when Emmie's fellow swung on too Emmie said, 'Here, clear out; we've got the footman waitin' for us, an' we mustn't let him see us with you lot.'"

The trimmer laughed again at the joke, and Miss

Frisby said "Oh!" and chuckled herself, and thought what a glorious thing life was if you could only catch it, instead of letting it go past.

"Those two," she said, with a shake of her head. "Well, tell them not to make so much noise." She could afford to tell them to be quiet, now she knew what the story was.

The trimmer nodded and went upstairs as Miss Frisby pulled down the clap.

"Not to make so much row," said the trimmer, as she entered the workroom.

"Who says?" asked Alice Cannel.

"Miss Frisby."

"*Her!*" And there were defiant laughs. "She wants a chap's arm round her, and then she'd make row enough."

And there was a scream of laughter from the young girls, while the elder ones, married and single, looked at one another and enjoyed the remark, but went on busily with that click, click, click, click of the stitch in the hat.

Men had occasions to go to the trimming-room, and their attitudes were always well noticed by the trimmers. There was young Mr. Timothy, who walked about them with a certain ease and with an air that told the more alert and keen that he quite realised he was amongst women, some of them young and pretty.

There was also Mr. Sims from the warehouse, a young man with big blue eyes and a lot of straight hair, who had now and then to look after a hat that was being trimmed. He was nervous the moment he opened the door. Most of the women were bending over their hats, which they held on their knees as they worked, but they always had to look up to see who it was that had entered.

The married and elder ones went on with their work as if there was nothing to disturb their equanimity in the presence of this light-complexioned man from the warehouse. But the younger women — Emmie Bollins, Alice Cannel, Lizzie Smaile, and many others — began to look at one another furtively. One of them would even venture to cough and giggle. They were all feeling: "Isn't he nervous? It's we girls that make him like that. . . ." And they thoroughly enjoyed what they considered to be a manifestation of feminine power and triumph.

Mr. Sims had to go to one of these younger ones occasionally, and then she was made somewhat nervous by the little coughs and sniggers of the others; and when Mr. Sims had gone their tongues would clack fifteen to the dozen.

"Alice, he did look at you! . . . That'll be all right."

"Well, he'd something to look at," retorted Alice, scarlet with the attention. "But I want none of him; he's half rocked."

"He's as feeart as a canary, is that mon," said Mary Blake once; and the trimmers shouted with glee and called Sims "Canary" behind his back ever after.

Mr. Bilson, the traveller, was of another breed. He was dark and gazed, rather than glanced, at the girls. He would stride in the trimming-room as if he were on his own domestic hearth, and could joke and look at any of them without turning a hair or appearing the least bit shy. In fact, he stared deliberately, on occasions, at some of them; and most of them, though they felt they would like to stare him out, never dared to put their fate to the test when the opportunity presented itself.

Emmie did look at him once and caught his eye. His eye hung on the gaze. Emmie tried bravado; she was not going to be stared at like that. . . . But she could

not keep it up. And when he had gone she looked furious.

"Brazen face," she gasped.

The others laughed.

"He has a nerve, that Mester Bilson."

"I'd like to slap his face," said Emmie, still excited that the man should have treated her as so much submissive material, staring at her like that. . . .

"I never look at him," said Lizzie Smaile. "No fear. He regular hooks his eyes on you if you start lookin' at him. . . . No, I let Mester Bilson see th' back o' my head — that's enough for him."

"Perhaps it is," said Alice Cannel wickedly, and there followed some sharp words and phrases to the accompaniment of laughter and other people's remarks and always that click, click, click, as the needle went through the hat.

It was Saturday morning, always a morning different from any other of the week. It was a half day and a pay day. There was a general unwillingness to begin anything really big that morning. The atmosphere was unsettling except in busy times when work dominated and hats seemed to multiply unconscionably and almost called to be trimmed at once, so that they could go out in the world and live their gay lives.

The trimming-room was swept every morning — water was splashed on the floor and the dust carefully gathered up with all the pieces of paper, the bits of silk and satin cut from linings, the ends of leathers and bands, et cetera.

As the trimmers arrived they took off hats and coats or shawls, and some of them changed the boots they had walked in for slippers and old boots — some for ease, but mostly for economy. Some of them carried big, black

stuff bags in which were the hats they had taken home to trim, and were now brought back finished.

Many of these were trimmed by the mothers of the girls, who were enabled in that way to earn money at home.

Some of the trimmers had work to do the moment they arrived; others had to go and ask Miss Frisby if she had any hats for them. The fact that the trimmers were "on piece work" gave them a sense of freedom, and they never felt the need to observe a punctuality that was incumbent on those who were paid a definite weekly wage.

There was always a buzz of conversation to start the morning's work. Some of the trimmers brought sewing of their own to do in case there were no hats for them to trim, and they were always ready to hear and retail the latest bits of gossip. There were no halfpenny morning papers then, and the only newspapers most of the trimmers ever read were the local sheets or the *Manchester Weekly Times,* the *Sunday Chronicle* or *Umpire,* the first for its stories and the others glanced at curiously after fathers or husbands or brothers had read them.

Emmie Bollins and Alice Cannel sat next to one another at the same table. Neither had any work to do this particular morning — at least none that was so urgent as the bodice Alice was finishing or the hat Emmie was trimming for herself. They helped each other with criticism and suggestion.

"Where shall we go to-night?" Alice said.

"Dunno. . . . Not going to Ashton this Saturday," said Emmie, as she bit her thread.

"Why?" Alice guessed the reason.

Emmie gave a little grunt and shook her shoulders. Then she laughed.

And then they both stopped their work and laughed and laughed, till the others watched them with interest and a tickling inquisitiveness that had ultimately to melt in a contagious laughter.

"Them two!" said Alice, with tears on her cheeks.

"Old corncrake!" said Emmie with contempt, and then she quickly burst into laughter again. Clearly they were thinking of the chaps they had been with the previous Saturday.

"We haven't been to Belle Vue for a long while," said Alice.

"No ——"

"Shall we go?"

"Don't mind."

"We can always have a bit o' fun there!"

"Um. An' th' fireworks are on, aren't they?"

"Ay. Well, I'll call for you, shall I, after tea?"

"Yes. I'll be ready. Half past five or a quarter to six?"

"Right. . . . Suppose we see them two again?"

"Push 'em in t' lake!" said Emmie quickly, and then they burst into laughter once more, while Miss Balke, at the end of the table, said: "You girls. T't, t't. . . . I wonder what mischief you're up to?"

Alice whispered: "A bit what she'd like to be up to if she could."

Emmie giggled and bent over her hat to hide her emotion.

The morning passed away in its usual way. Some of those who had no hats to trim went home and left their wages to be collected by friends.

Alice and Emmie finished their private dressmaking and millinery in good time and to their complete satisfaction, and were quite ready to get their money when

they received the news that it was obtainable. Emmie's earnings that particular Saturday were one pound five shillings and sixpence.

She and Alice left the works together. They were both neatly dressed, but not, of course, showily. The black aprons they wore in the trimming-room were left behind. Emmie wore her new hat and felt quite fittingly adorned. The two friends parted almost at the gates of the factory, for Emmie lived quite near and Alice had to go in another direction.

They reminded each other of the evening's programme.

"Don't forget, Alice."

"I won't. And you be ready."

"I'll be ready, right enough."

"Yes, like you were last time — kept me half an hour."

"Oh! Go on wi' your gabble! . . . Half past five — not later than a quarter to six."

"Right!"

Young men that Emmie knew nodded to her smilingly as they passed her, and gave her a little pleasure by the lingering way they looked.

She went to a shop that was really a converted private house, where a widow sold home made bread, and bought four big hot currant cakes. She did this every Saturday as a treat for the family.

Emmie lived with her father and mother and sister in a little house in Silton Street. There were two rooms downstairs and two up, with a yard, where coals could be stored at the back. The range was in the front room, which was living-room, and the scullery in the rear contained a slop stone as well as a copper for washing.

The front door was generally open, as it was of most of the houses in that street, for it let in fresh air, and it

was easier for anybody inside to see who was passing and what was going on outside. One walked straight from the street into this front room, where there was a dresser to the right which had on it some lustre ornaments, some wax flowers under a glass shade and a little marble cross, also under glass. The household linen, cutlery and all kinds of things, were kept in the drawers. There was a round table in the middle of the room, with a white cloth on it that had been there since the preceding Sunday. On Sunday a clean cloth was used, and in the afternoon a dark green one was taken off the dresser and put on the table. At supper time the white cloth took its place, and till the following Sunday it was not thought worth while to take it off again.

There was a horsehair sofa against the wall, a curious wire arrangement for plants under the window, and four wooden chairs. On Saturday afternoon, when the cleaning was done, a hearth rug made of pieces of felt was spread near the shining fender. There was no carpet on the floor, but oilcloth, which was badly worn in certain flagrant spots.

Mrs. Bollins was in the scullery when Emmie reached home.

"Mother!"

"That you, Emmie?"

"Yes. Sarah come?"

"Not yet."

"I thought they weren't busy at Gibbs & Sons."

"She's stopped talking, I reckon."

Mrs. Bollins emerged from the scullery, wiping her hands and arms and looking tired.

Emmie put the cakes on the table.

Mrs. Bollins said: "That your new hat?"

"Yes; like it?"

"Yes. Looks very well. Eh! You girls do spend money on clothes."

"Well. . . . Here you are, Mother," and Emmie handed her mother fifteen shillings.

Mrs. Bollins counted it. She was content. If only the other girl did as much and the father did his share, Mrs. Bollins felt she would have no worries at home. But Sarah didn't make as much as Emmie, and some weeks only drew ten shillings, though now and again her book mounted to seventeen or eighteen shillings in the busy season. But Emmie was a glutton for work when there was work to be done.

Mrs. Bollins wrapped up the money in a piece of paper and put it in a corner of one of the dresser drawers under some sheets.

"Reckon you could do with some tea," said Mrs. Bollins.

"I could that."

Emmie had got her hat in her hand and was looking at it.

"This'll go well with that red dress, won't it?"

"Yes. . . . That 'ud go with anything . . . black, like that. . . ."

"Um. . . . Looks stylish."

"Well, don't go and make a fool of yourself wi' all your stylish things."

Emmie laughed.

"I shall make no fool o' myself," she said, as she put her hat on the dresser, near the wax flowers. "Father not come yet?"

"No."

"Let's have some tea, Mother," said Emmie, as she took hold of one of the cakes, broke it and began to eat.

Mrs. Bollins sat down and then rose the next minute.

"Ah shall forget mi 'ead next." She spoke very quietly, as if she were very tired. "Here I am sittin' down an' no tea in t' pot."

Like so many people in Ganton, Mrs. Bollins could not be relied on to speak with a consistent accent. Occasionally she was almost broad, particularly with those who spoke broadly or when she was tired; at other times her speech, though preserving its Lancashire note, can fairly be reproduced with correct spelling.

Emmie pushed her mother back in her chair.

"You sit down; I'll put the kettle on. These cakes aren't bad to-day."

"No. . . . But they soon go stale if you don't eat 'em quick."

"Mrs. Short was buyin' two when I was in t' shop."

"Was she?"

Emmie, having filled the kettle at the slopstone tap, put it on the fire.

"It'll soon boil," she said.

"There's some potatoes in a dish in t' scullery, if you'd like to fry 'em," said Mrs. Bollins.

"No," said Emmie quickly. "This'll do me," meaning she would have quite a sufficient dinner with the tea cake she was eating. "I'll make some potato cakes for tea, shall I?"

"If you like. . . . Your father likes 'em."

Emmie laughed. "An' so do you. I'll make some." She stuffed another piece of the cake in her mouth and spoke in a muffled tone. "Sha-ah mop-er."

Mrs. Bollins seemed to grasp easily enough the mixture of mastication and speech as signifying "Shall I mop this?" for she said readily: "If you like. I've

got a bit o' washing to finish an' your father'll do th' yard."

Emmie put tea in the pot, reached down a couple of cups and saucers from the cupboard and then put on a big white apron. She moved about with alertness and energy.

Sarah, her sister, came in.

Mrs. Bollins looked at her. She was saying vaguely to herself that she would have some more money now, but not so much as Emmie had given her. She wiped her hands on her apron in an instinctive preparation for receiving it.

Sarah said: "Done your hat, Emmie?"

"Yes."

Emmie put it on at once and Sarah approved, which pleased Emmie.

"Get yourself a cup, Sarah," said Mrs. Bollins.

Sarah took off her hat and coat, took a cake from the table and bit a lump off it. When she had got herself a cup she took out some money and handed Mrs. Bollins eight shillings.

"Got to buy a pair o' boots this week," she said.

Mrs. Bollins said nothing. Under the circumstances she was satisfied, for she knew Sarah had not had a very good week.

When they had all eaten a cake and drunk tea, which was their usual Saturday dinner, they attacked domestic duties. Sarah made the beds and swept and dusted the bedrooms, Mrs. Bollins washed some clothes in the scullery, and Emmie at once began to sweep the kitchen and then to clean it.

As she scrubbed with soap and brush she would kneel upright, push back a bit of hair and tell her mother some

of the gossip from the hat works. And Sarah would run downstairs with:

"Eh! What d'you think? That Susan White's going to marry Arthur Chandler on Monday. They're going to Buxton. When they come back they're going to live in Nelly Street, you know, one o' them houses that back on th' field. She's got a new dark blue tailor-made costume for goin' away in. Alice Meggs is goin' to th' weddin'. They say they're goin' to Marple after, an' havin' a big tea there."

"I suppose Mester White'll pay for that," said Mrs. Bollins.

Emmie looked as if she were picturing the scene. The wedding . . . the bride particularly. . . .

She dashed her mop in the bucket.

"Well, she can have him for all I care — and welcome," she said.

"Me too," said Sarah. "She's been walkin' out with him for six years, an' she says she's lucky — well, that's what Mary Jecks told me."

"Lucky. . . . I think if I'd had him I should have thought myself lucky if some'dy had run away with him," said Emmie, with a laugh, as she slapped the dripping cloth on the floor.

"Me too," said Sarah, as she went upstairs again.

Then Emmie, as she mopped, sang to herself:

> "White wings they never grow weary,
> They carry me cheerily over the foam. . . ."

As she worked, she threw her mind into the business. If she saw a particularly dirty spot she would say to herself: "That's dirty . . . wonder how it got like that?" and she would scrub till it was as clean and reproachless as the rest. She got through the work

quickly. She seemed to know exactly what to do when she got up, so that she wasted no time in putting pieces of furniture into inconvenient places or in wondering whether she ought to do under the window now or by the fireplace. . . .

Her mother always realised that Emmie was a good worker.

After having mopped the kitchen floor, Emmie took out some brown stone and cleaned the door step and window sill, browning them evenly with her floor-cloth.

"That's done, Mother," she said, as she poured away the dirty water, wrung out the floorcloth and threw it under the slop stone. "Let me wash my hands, will you?"

"Goin' to mix them cakes now?" Mrs. Bollins said.

"Yes. Haven't you finished that washing?"

"Nearly."

When Emmie had mixed the potato cakes she looked at the little round clock on the mantelshelf — the larger one on the wall never went.

"Five minutes to four." . . . Emmie took the two chairs off the sofa — she had placed them there while she had scrubbed the floor — put down the mat at the door, tidied the place and then looked round as if for fresh domestic worlds to conquer.

"You don't want me to do anything else, do you, Mother?" she asked.

Mrs. Bollins hesitated. She had just finished her washing.

"No-o. Have you done them cakes?"

"Yes. They're ready to go in th' oven."

"No. There's nothin' else, then. Sarah can set th' table."

Emmie went upstairs, where she found Sarah looking at her dress.

"Guessed as much," said Emmie. "You an' work'll never fall out," and she picked up her best boots, which were under the bed, preparatory to cleaning them.

Sarah did not seem to mind reproaches on that head.

"Goin' to Ashton to-night," she said.

"Who with?"

"Polly Bell."

"Goin' by yourselves?"

"We're goin' to meet two chaps there."

"H'm. . . . Take care o' yourself."

"Go on wi' you! As if we couldn't. . . . My chap's a jolly nice fellow; he's at Guide Bridge Station; don't know what — clerk, I suppose ——"

"Well, why don't you go downstairs an' set t' table an' finish your work first?"

"What are you botherin' about? . . . I thought o' putting in a bit o' blue in these squares . . . what d'you think?"

"No," said Emmie quickly; "it 'ud make it too showy — look like a gipsy's. You keep it as it is; it was a good dress and looks good; don't spoil it."

"H'm. . . ." Sarah sighed, put the dress on the bed and went downstairs.

Mrs. Bollins was reading the local paper, but as she heard Sarah coming downstairs she hastily placed it on the sofa and was looking anxiously at the oven when Sarah entered the room.

"You, is it?" she said quietly, as if tired. "Emmie's made some potato cakes. . . . Your father likes 'em. . . . I wonder if this oven'll be hot enough?"

"I'll lay table, Mother, for tea, 'cause I want to get dressed."

"All right; I'll just sit me down a bit."

"Have you finished?"

"Finished? . . . Me? . . . My work's never done."

Sarah began to hum:

"Wait till the clouds roll by, Jenny,
Wait till the clouds roll by,
Jenny, my own true loved one,
Wait till the clouds roll by . . ."

Mrs. Bollins felt that now she really could have a look at the paper again. And yet she was not able to read without disturbance, for when Emmie and Sarah upstairs were dressing themselves Mr. Bollins came in, and Mrs. Bollins, with a conscientious desire to keep up the rôle of the tireless or tired, but certainly ceaseless, worker in the house, threw down the paper instantly, got up and at once began to look as if she were absorbed in that unending chain of work which claimed her from morning to night. Not that she was an idle woman; but she liked the reputation and sympathy that seemed to attach to the incessant worker and cherished the idea that her good name, if she were once caught reading a newspaper in the daytime, would go.

"Tea ready?" asked Mr. Bollins.

"It will be soon. I'll put these potato cakes in now."

When the tea was ready, Mr. and Mrs. Bollins sat down to it with their two daughters, who were wearing large white aprons to protect their best frocks. Mr. Bollins described how he had nearly beaten Tom Sales, who was one of the best bowlers in Ganton.

"Eh! If Ah'd only 'ad mi chance," he said, shaking his head, "Ah'd ha' bin one o' t' best bowlers in England. . . . Ah would that . . . if Ah'd only 'ad mi chance."

Mr. Bollins was great on this lack of chance from which he suffered. He had an idea he might have achieved great things if he'd had what he called a chance. . . .

During the course of the tea Emmie remarked that some man had got on and made a fortune. Mr. Bollins shook his head. "Ay. . . . When Ah were twenty-one Ah 'ad an idea. . . . If only Ah'd 'ad mi chance Ah'd ha' made a big fortune . . . a big 'un . . . if Ah'd only 'ad mi chance. . . ."

As they sat at the table Mr. Bollins was without his coat, and Mrs. Bollins had not yet washed herself. She was always washing her hands, she said, and when she washed herself in the afternoon she was supposed to have reached a certain stage in domestic arrangements that justified the proceeding. But each Saturday, when tea was ready, she would murmur with the little self-deception that was now part and substance of her being: "I don't think I'll wash before tea . . . I'll wait till after," and one of the girls generally said: "Yes, Mother. Sit down and rest."

After tea Mr. Bollins filled his pipe, sat at the open door and read the local paper. Mrs. Bollins then washed herself before going out to do the marketing. Sometimes she washed the pots, but generally left them till the next day, when the girls were at home and able to lend a hand in the domestic work.

Alice Cannel called for Emmie, and when they set out for Belle Vue, Mrs. Bollins stood at the door watching them go. She was very proud of her daughter, who was certainly a remarkably handsome girl, and dressed very well.

"They might just as well enjoy themselves when they're young," she murmured. The phrase seemed to



be a little reminiscent of her own youth, blended with her added experience since.

Neighbours watched the two girls go.

"There's Emmie Bollins and Alice Cannel. . . . Emmie's got a new hat on — a black 'un, trimmed with red; it goes with her dress. She fancies herself, but she's a good-looking lass. . . . Off gallivantin' somewhere. . . ."

Emmie and Alice walked down Silton Street, out of the sight of relatives and neighbours.

CHAPTER II

"LET'S walk to the Wilton," said Emmie.

"We can walk all the way if we don't catch a train," said Alice.

In the year 1885 a horse tram ran every half hour from Ganton to Manchester, passing on its way the famous Zoological Gardens known familiarly as "Belle Vue" (pronounced Belle *View*). Belle Vue, situated about midway between Ganton and Piccadilly (Manchester), is an astonishing place. The collection of animals is extraordinarily varied and interesting, but there is also a kind of Luna Park or Coney Island as part of the attraction, as well as a great dancing hall. And from Whitsuntide till the 5th of November there are fireworks; not ordinary fireworks, not yet extraordinary fireworks, but something one would not guess from the word fireworks — a realistic representation of a battle, in which scores (perhaps hundreds) of men take part, cannons roar and blaze, turrets and towers, bastions and forts are shattered and fall and all culminates in a burst of brilliant and dazzling fireworks.

It was to Belle Vue that Emmie and Alice were going, as were a great many other people from places situated on all sides of Manchester.

It was clearly Saturday afternoon or evening, for so many best clothes were to be seen. Men and women on the road to Manchester or Enjoyment somewhere, had donned their best clothes and felt far different beings than they did on Saturday morning. And the dresses were not simple working girls' dresses, but things of

taste and style and quality. The trimmer who earned good wages indulged the great attractive instinct of her sex: she spent freely — almost lavishly — on dress.

Along Manchester Road there was a thin stream of these "best dressed" folk. It was not a thick stream; there was nothing torrential about it; but any one coming from Manchester towards Ganton would have noticed the solitary clean, Sunday-clothed man, ditto girl, then couple, then man, then girl, and so on. . . . It was Ganton at play on Saturday night. A similar stream went towards Hyde and another towards Ashton, though Manchester, with Belle Vue as its allurement, was the most popular. Obviously Ganton was not able to hold the enterprising Gantonians in their hours of ease.

As a matter of plain fact, Emmie and Alice walked all the way to Belle Vue because the tram did not overtake them at an economical stopping place. One may spend, but one must not waste, and there were no penny fares in 1885.

They invaded "Belle Vue" at the lake entrance, and at once took possession of the atmosphere of the place. Till then they had talked of all sorts of things, of dress, of people, of hat shops and things seen by the road, a plain, unlovely road, particularly after crossing the canal, which was a little beyond the Ganton boundary. The factory chimney of Lancashire casts an enormous shadow.

On the lake in the gardens of Belle Vue there were boats plying, and a steamer was paddling round for those who did not care to venture in the small craft.

Emmie's eyes brightened at the sight. There was youth at the helm and pleasure at the prow; it was a scene of jollity and gladness. If a youth caught a crab there were general rejoicings all round, including gra-

tuitous advice and comment — all of a wild superfluity in the crab catcher's opinion.

The picture struck both Emmie and Alice. They gazed with lips slightly parted in token of latent eagerness. The scene harmonised with their feelings.

"Shall we go on?" said Alice.

"Let's wait a bit," said Emmie.

Two youths in a small boat gave them a cordial invitation.

"We haven't come here to drown ourselves," said Alice.

"You'll not drown. . . . Ah'll hold you."

"Wouldn't you like the chance?"

"Come on. . . ."

"Go and wash yourselves," said Emmie, and she and Alice, in a bubbling humour of high spirits, laughed and walked on.

It was a pleasant summer evening and the lake had its full toll of pleasure seekers. There were a number of people strolling about watching those on the water, and small queues waiting for small boats and for places on the steamers, that created washes which allured the daring and made the timorous scream.

"I'd like to have a peep at t' lions," said Alice.

"Come on," said Emmie, "before it gets too dark."

"Yes. We've not too much time."

They hurried on past the lake, missing, even in their quickness, no respectable and attractive young man who was within a fair comprehending circle. One or two nods were unambiguous and a "Mother doesn't want you so soon, does she?" brought a quick look of haughtiness which was immediately smothered in laughter.

"Come on," said Emmie, dragging Alice, "they're after us."

Alice was dragged unwillingly. If males were after them it was worth while walking slow. . . . You could always tell 'em to sling their hook. . . .

But Emmie always seemed as if she could treat homage with a prodigal's disdain.

"What did you want to run for?" said Alice.

"They were up to nowt," said Emmie.

In the building which housed the lions and tigers, the girls, at first, were interested, but soon they looked at each other as if moved by a common thought.

Emmie pulled a face.

"Whiffey, isn't it?"

"Just what I was thinkin'," said Alice, as she, too, pulled a face. "It does stink, doesn't it?"

They laughed, put their handkerchiefs to their noses, and went out into the fresh air.

Egged on by similar motives, they quietly made a bee-line for the dancing-room. Both of them looked more eager, more lively, as they caught sight of moving couples and heard the strains of the music.

The ballroom at Belle Vue is a huge place, with enormous and gorgeous pictures painted on its walls portraying some of the stirring and emotional incidents in history and mythology, as well as views of gorgeous landscape and seascape. An orchestra, pitched on a high platform out of the way of the dancers, played the seductive music. It was a public dancing place, and if visitors wished to dance the opportunity was given them.

Clearly there were a great number of people of both sexes, who were prepared for the luck of the casual encounter. And the pretty girls were certainly not likely to be overlooked.

Emmie and Alice had no sooner set foot in the ball-

room than glances were shot towards them from right and left.

"Pooh! You may look," said Alice, with withering scorn, in a whisper to Emmie, referring to the wholesale ogling she was being subjected to (or fancied she was) on the part of a youth with a high stiff collar and his hat on one side.

"Who is— Oh! *him!* . . ." Emmie turned away too. Rich people can be proud; people with famous ancestors can assume a haughty demeanour, but for withering contempt there is no one to beat the young pretty girl to the audacious male.

"Come on," said Emmie to Alice, as she slid an arm round her, and they joined in the polka that was then being danced.

Of course the two girls enjoyed dancing for its own sake. But not wholly. Even as Emmie and Alice danced they knew they were doing two things: they were allowing themselves to be seen and they were showing those who really wished to know that they could dance.

It would have been a very disappointing evening if they had had to dance together the whole time.

When the music ceased they walked round the room very slowly, standing still now and again to see who was there.

Variety there certainly was. There was a little party from nice respectable homes, which had come for the fireworks and taken occasion by the neck to enjoy the dance. There were great numbers, like Emmie and Alice, who came to enjoy themselves and took the risk of companions. And there were others. The men ranged from the bald and fat and red nosed to the callow youth who had half a crown a week to spend and man-

aged to get rid of it all on a Saturday night at Belle Vue.

Alice and Emmie saw themselves making the attraction they deserved and hoped for. They began picking and choosing mentally. They proceeded by a process of attrition. "Pooh! that chap." And the head was thrown up with a little jerk and the eye roved elsewhere. They were quite ready to hold out the golden sceptre, only they did want the grasper to be reasonably attractive. Besides, they were always willing to try. A man might be very nice as a dancer . . . and vice versa.

Suddenly Alice said: "There's Mr. Tim."

"Where?" asked Emmie quickly.

"There."

Emmie turned and saw her master's only son standing in the ballroom, much better dressed than he was at the works, looking with a pleasant eye on the pleasure-makers about him.

For a moment they were both silent — Alice and Emmie, that is.

Mr. Tim did not appear to have seen them; he was talking to a friend.

Emmie instinctively began to straighten herself and look as if she were quite a superior being.

She caught Mr. Tim's eye, and he gave her a smile and a nod.

His friend looked and said something, and Emmie could feel Mr. Tim saying: "One of our trimmers. . . ." She didn't mind. She was a trimmer . . . there was no shame in working for your living.

The band struck up.

Alice said: "A waltz. . . . Shall we?"

"No," said Emmie quickly. "Get a chap," she added, with a laugh.

In an instant a young man was bowing to Alice.

"May I have the pleasure, Miss?" Alice looked — it had to be done speedily to see if he was all right. Yes, he wasn't bad. She leaned forward in an act of sweet surrender, and went waltzing round the room with mingled feelings — joy in the dance and curiosity in her partner, translated into the blunt question which was in her mind: "What sort of a chap have I got hold of?"

Emmie was also accosted. A young gentleman, friend of Alice's partner, bowed before her and hoped he might have the pleasure . . . but Emime shook her head. "No, thanks," she said.

"What!" he said. "Not dancing? Oh! Yes, your friend is."

"No, thanks."

"Oh! Go on. Don't be shy. . . . Shall we sit it out somewhere?"

"You can sit where you like," said Emmie, "so long as it isn't near me."

"That's it, is it? Haughty!"

"Well, you asked for it. Move on!"

He pulled a face, but he moved on.

Emmie was a little surprised at herself. She was not usually irritable or sharp with the young men who came to ask her to dance. Even if she refused their invitations, she did it with the attitude of one who might still be a sister to them. But she did feel just a little excited. . . . It was Mr. Tim, of course.

She had seen all sorts and conditions of people at Belle Vue; some people who wouldn't like their names mentioned at any rate, and some quite as well off as, if not better, than Mr. Tim. And yet. . . . When he had smiled at her and given her that little nod, he had done

so with an air or something that told Emmie there was more in it than in the mere salutation.

At least she wasn't going to dance — for a bit. She was going to wait and see. She had vague ideas running in her pretty head, but one, at least, was clear: if Mr. Tim was going to be taken with her and asked her to dance, she wasn't going to say No. . . . No fear. . . .

She pretended to be watching the dancers, but every now and then those piercing eyes of hers looked from under lashes and brows towards Mr. Tim.

He was coming.

"What a bit o' luck I didn't dance with that chump as asked me just now," Emmie said to herself.

She moved a little shyly, but kept up a beautiful succession of glances on Mr. Tim as he came towards her.

"He's going to ask me," she was saying to herself. "And wouldn't they stare in that trimming-room if they could see! Mr. Tim coming to me. . . . He's here, right enough. . . ."

All this while Emmie was a picture of beauty and innocence. She looked as if she had no thought but of the dance, and yet was really too shy to join in it, or was it too dignified or too prudent? . . .

Timothy Booke was clearly struck with her.

He, too, had a true Ganton spirit, and was not to be caught out first ball through a blind swipe. He had the canniness of his race, if he had certain other qualities as well. After all, he was, in a sense, this girl's employer. "T. Booke & Son" was his father's, and would ultimately be his, to pass on in the course of time, if things went well, to his son. And this young woman was a trimmer in their factory. And a very pretty young

woman, too. . . . You could go a long way without finding a prettier. Timothy Booke had been looking at the girls in that ballroom, and not one of them, in his opinion, was fit to hold a candle to Emmie Bollins. He had always thought she was a pretty wench, but in these clothes, in that red dress and gloves and hat. . . .

He nodded and smiled, but did not take off his hat. Emmie did not expect it. She smiled readily.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, in a kind of bantering tone, not wanting any really definite answer.

"Same as most folk," said Emmie quickly.

He gave a little snort. "You look smart," he said.

"Do I?" She was pleased he noticed it, a little ruffled he mentioned it.

"Yes."

"So do you."

He laughed.

"Do you dance?"

"Sometimes."

"Why didn't you dance with that chap as asked you just now?"

"Didn't want to."

"H'm. . . . Well, would you like one?"

"Wouldn't mind. . . ."

"Come on, then," and he put his arm round her and they went dancing round to the tune of the Blue Danube waltz.

Emmie felt in a kind of ecstasy. It was the triumph that thrilled her. She had caught the look in Mr. Tim's eyes which blazoned admiration, and Emmie knew that face of hers had made its impression.

Dancing with Mr. Tim. . . . If only the other trimmers could see her now! Mr. Timothy Booke had come up to her and asked her to dance with him. . . .

She hoped to goodness Alice could see her.

Emmie danced well. So did Mr. Tim.

"Do you often come here?" he asked.

"Not very often. . . . Do you?"

He smiled. There was a hint of mischievousness in the question.

"Now and then," he said, and as he looked at her, he was quite pleased to be dancing with her. She was certainly dressed very well and tastefully. Nobody need be ashamed of being seen with her. And she was as pretty a girl as there was in that room. That black hair of hers and those dark eyebrows went well with that red dress of hers, trimmed with black. A well-made girl, too. As he held her with his arm, he felt she was both solid and supple; neither putty nor wood, as he had once vaguely described the girl who did not displease him.

Emmie knew quite well what he was thinking, and allowed herself to be drawn a little closer. She knew the value of her sex. He began to hold her more tightly. She said to herself, "That's all right." Behind it all there was the confidence she had that she was not going to be made a fool of.

"You dance well," he said.

"Do I?"

"Yes."

"So do you."

He was pleased.

"You've done a bit o' dancin', or you wouldn't do it so well."

"A bit," she said; "I'm not always dancin'."

She was enjoying herself very much, and liked this conversation on equal terms. In the factory things were not quite the same; but here in a ballroom beauty could raise the lowly to the level of the mighty. And Emmie

knew it. She felt the admiration of Mr. Tim as certainly as she heard the music. She knew it was not a mere casual invitation to a waltz, but a liking for her. As his looks lingered on her face, on her figure, she glanced at him in that semi-timid, but always attractive, style of hers, and then lowered her lashes. It looked like the beautiful surrender which the male likes. But Emmie was very pleased at his examination, for she was saying to herself: "Go on. I don't mind. The more you look, the more you'll want to."

Then the music stopped.

Emmie was not quite sure what she ought to do, and so pushed back one or two hairs that were trying to get out of place, and one or two that needed no attention. She was flushed with the excitement and the dance.

The other couples were now walking to the seats round the room or standing in little groups.

Tim Booke hesitated. He had not yet made up his mind what to do. He had come to Belle Vue for a little idle pleasure, and found a pleasure that was rather keener than he had anticipated.

Emmie thought, "Well, I'm not going to move off if he isn't," and she sincerely hoped if there were any Ganton people in the room, who had not had the satisfaction of noticing her dancing with Mr. Timothy Booke, Junior, that they at least might see her talking to him now.

"I don't know whether you drink or not," he said.

"No, thanks. I'm teetotal."

"Oh! Glad to hear it; I don't believe in women who drink. Well, I enjoyed that dance."

"Very nice," muttered Emmie, very pleased.

"I had a friend when I came here." He looked round. "I must find him."

"He's going," said Emmie to herself.

"I've got somebody with me," she said. A certain instinct — very common amongst Gantonians — made her hoist her own flag of independence.

"Well, er. . . . I'll, er. . . . We'll have another dance, eh, Emmie, in a bit?"

"All right," she said, trying to be calm and not too joyful, though she was bubbling with a triumphant satisfaction.

He smiled and walked away.

Emmie watched him go and felt supremely happy. What had happened harmonised with the proper fitness of things. She had not dreamt exactly of a prince, but she had had ideas, that with a little stretching, might get into that category. She turned round and caught sight of herself in a mirror. The view pleased her. If it came to looks she could beat him any day. She tilted her head a little and threw her rounded chin into prominence . . . stretched herself, and was glad that her figure was good. Also that she was well dressed. No man need be ashamed of being with her.

"Here you are," said Alice Cannel. "Well . . . I saw you with Mr. Tim, wasn't it?"

"Yes," said Emmie, very glad that she had not had to mention the matter first, for that would have looked like boasting.

"Has he gone?"

"Only to his friend."

"Is he comin' back?"

"Yes." Emmie said it carelessly, as if it were a casual and very natural thing; nothing to get excited about.

"Oh!" Alice wondered for a minute if Mr. Tim would have asked her if she hadn't gone with the other man. "Mine was all right," she said quickly. "He



danced beautifully; bit of a masher, but he isn't a common chap; he asked me if I'd have a glass of port, but I said No, thanks. It was a lovely tune, wasn't it? Um ti. . . ." And Alice hummed it. "What's up?" she asked.

"Nothing. Why?"

"You're so quiet. Is it because you've been dancin' with Mr. Tim?"

"Pooh! As if I bothered my head about that. Let's walk about a bit. A lot o' folks here to-night, isn't there?"

"Um. . . ."

When the next dance was played a gentleman, who had evidently been watching his opportunity, dashed towards Emmie and made the usual request. But she declined; she wasn't dancing — at least not this time, thanks.

Alice, attacked during Emmie's proposal with one for herself, gave in at once.

Emmie did not feel at all neglected. She wondered what had come over her to make her refuse, once she had started, for she did love dancing. Where was Mr. Tim? Was he dancing with anybody? She looked about.

No, he was not. He was talking to some one. That was his friend. . . . She watched him. Suddenly he looked in her direction and smiled pleasantly. She turned round, feeling quite happy, and refused three more tempting offers of partners for the dance in progress.

CHAPTER III

MR. TIMOTHY BOOKE, JUNIOR, was pleasant-faced, light-complexioned, about twenty-six years of age. He had obstinacy in his jaw and could be relied on. He was not original or sparklingly audacious, but he could stick and had a good dose of plain common sense. He liked pleasure and never funked work, was not given to excesses and impressed women as a gentle kind of man, one to be trusted and not to be feared. He had calm blue eyes, a straight nose, a light moustache over a mouth rather big for his face — good-tempered, you would say at once.

He was dressed in cleanliness, clean boots and a well-fitting, good dark brown suit. He carried nothing of the dirt of the works with him when he went out on Saturday evening.

Twenty-six. . . . It was really time he was married. His father occasionally mentioned it in a curt way, and his relatives, particularly his aunts — suggested it frequently and with uncommendable locution.

But he went his own way. Nobody — no lady, that is — had appealed to him yet in such a way as to persuade him to ask her to be his wife. He worked fairly hard during the daytime, and in the evenings there was the club — what chance had he, really, of being thrown with those who might allure him with the fascinations of sex? An occasional dance, occasional meetings. . . .

He had met many pleasant young ladies on his short summer holidays to Blackpool, the Isle of Man and Llandudno, and amused himself with them. Yet he was single and unattached.

He had come to "Belle Vue" merely to pass an agreeable evening, and not expected to meet one of his own — say, his father's — trimmers there. And now that he had seen Emmie Bollins in that room and danced with her, he felt a great desire to look at her frequently, to watch her, observe her. . . .

He had, of course, always known that she was pretty, but he had never been struck with her appearance as he was now. She was beautiful; the belle of the place.

Even as he sought his friend, he did so with a tingling sensation of pleasure. He could imagine his arm still round Emmie's waist, her body close to his, her face, with the black hair above, the dark eyes, that finely curved line of the jaw from ear to ear, turned towards his. . . .

Mechanically, he turned to look at her again.

James Short, Tim's friend, was a younger man, from Manchester.

"That's a pretty girl you had, Tim."

"Yes."

"She is that. Did you know her?"

"Yes. She's one of our trimmers."

"One of your. . . . By Gum! I wouldn't mind having a half day in your trimming-room if that's the sort of trimmers you have."

"They're not all like her."

"I picked up a nice little bit."

"Oh. . . ."

"What are you goin' to do? Look after your little trimmer?"

"Might. I shall have another dance with her."

"Well, look here. I'll hitch on to that one I was with; suppose we get separated ——"

"Don't you bother about me," said Tim quickly.

"You don't mind?"
"Not a bit."
"Might suit you, perhaps?"
"I dunno. . . ."
"Well, see you to-morrow, as arranged."
"Yes."

And when Tim had parted with his friend, he looked for Emmie. The other girls did not attract him. He looked about him and kept saying: "Well, Emmie could give that 'un a start an' beat her in a canter. . . . And that. . . . And that. . . . And — oh!"

He did not betray too much emotion in his face, but a close watcher might have noticed the satisfactory something that stirred him and kept him well at pleasure's height.

There was a certain amount of prudence in his disposition, and he seemed to feel as if something held him back a little and cried "Not too fast, now."

The view commended itself to him; there was nothing to be gained by rushing matters, and probably nothing would be lost by a little care and caution and waiting.

He watched the couples dancing; they interested him in their variety. But he kept casting glances in the direction where he had last seen Emmie, and caught her eye twice. She, too, was looking. "What's the good o' this?" he said to himself, and walked towards her — not hurriedly, but as one who knows what he wants and sees no reason why he should not seek to realise it.

Emmie had noticed Mr. Tim's glances with a fiercely beating heart. One look was curiosity, but two and three and four looks lifted the gaze into the dominion of interest. And if you really get interested in a pretty

woman and want to watch her, the degree of interest can be screwed up and up and up.

"He's coming," said Emmie to herself.

She was ready, neither attempting a welcome nor a surprise. She just greeted him with a smile.

"Not got off yet?" he said, almost banteringly.

She shrugged her shoulders; his was banter with a scratch.

"My own fault, at any rate," she retorted quickly.

"You like dancing?"

"I needn't dance if I don't want to," she said.

"Oh! Come on. You're wasting time."

She laughed as he put his arm round her and started to dance with her.

"The music'll stop in a minute," she said.

"Never mind; a bit's better than nothing," and he felt a high quality of pleasure as he held her and moved with her. She was a most delectable body. He held her tight — a little tighter than was necessary.

"Now, then," she said, protestingly, but with a note that she could take care of herself — and would do so.

"You don't want to be held like a dozen hats, do you?" he said, with a pretence of justification.

She laughed. She did not mind, only you had to tell some of these men if there was a danger of them going too far. Besides, she wasn't going to stand any nonsense, even from Mr. Tim.

The band stopped.

He nodded his head.

"And we've only just started."

"Well, you should have come before," she said.

"I'll have the next waltz with you."

"All right."

He was just going to ask her to have a little stroll and get a breath of fresh air, when Alice Cannel came up.

"Hello!" said Mr. Tim. "You here too?"

"Yes."

"Enjoying yourself too, I'll bet."

"Not bad," said Alice, flushed and proclaiming her enjoyment flagrantly, pleasure's flags on her cheeks.

"That's right. Well, I'll see you again," he said to Emmie, and turned away.

Emmie was delighted at this "I'll see you again." It gave her such a nice intimacy with Mr. Tim before Alice.

"See you again, eh?" said Alice. "Is he going to have another dance with you?"

"Yes," said Emmie, with a superb note of ease and casualness, as if she danced with Mr. Tim and his kind whenever she wanted and thought nothing much of it, really.

"Oh-h. Mashed Mr. Tim, eh."

"Be quiet!"

Alice was light-hearted.

"Oh, well. This chap was a chump! Silly old beggar, talking about 'his people'! They keep three servants. Liar! Shouldn't be surprised if his mother takes in washin'." They laughed. "But he could dance. That first chap I had was nicer, only there was a dark fellow looking at me all the time I was dancin'! I wonder where he is?" . . . Alice turned round. . . .

Emmie was silent. She had nothing to say. Mr. Tim's attitude was impressive, even in its ease and apparent off-handedness. He would have stayed with her, so Emmie said to herself, if Alice hadn't come up. Still, she wasn't going to leave Alice; she couldn't do that. And besides, he was coming back again.

He did come back, and they danced together. There was no feeling of disappointment or disillusionment or surfeit with either; both were content.

Emmie breathed heavily, and her bosom rose and fell.

He looked at her admiringly.

"Come on outside a bit; it's so stuffy in here."

"No." She looked at him straight in the eyes.

He laughed.

"What are you afraid of? I only want to smoke a cigarette. We can walk round the building, and you'll be back before you can say Jack Robinson."

"All right," she said. "But where's Alice? I mustn't lose her."

"You don't want to be carrying her about with you. I only want a mouthful of fresh air and a smoke. Besides, she's all right; look at her."

Alice was talking with radiant vivacity to a man, who seemed very pleased to be in her company.

"Wait till I tell her," said Emmie, and she at once went to Alice and informed her she was just going out for a minute with Mr. Tim — only going for a bit of fresh air — she'd be back in a moment and would come there.

"All right," said Alice, rather markedly, and with a noticeable improvement in her usual pronunciation, as if she wished to let the gentleman with her hear how beautifully she spoke to her friend. This kind of thing was not common with Alice, but perhaps the gentleman had given her a lead; he had the air of one owning castles in Spain on Saturday night and turning his sleeves up on Monday.

Outside, Mr. Tim lit a cigarette.

"This is better," he said, and as they walked Emmie was just a trifle nervous. She had the feeling of aware-

ness, readiness and anticipation that a young, pretty, well-developed young lady of twenty-one almost instinctively summons when she is alone with a young man she has not often seen before in the dusk of the evening, after a dance at Belle Vue, and there are not too many people about and the lights are dim, and she has had hammered into her head the stern ideas that she must not get into mischief, or make a fool of herself or do anything of that kind, and knows a bit about the world and its ways. A mood quickly dispelled by something assuring.

As Mr. Tim walked by her side she felt that he had something on his mind. He did not talk brilliantly or with a dazzling wit, but he was pleasant and easy. Only he occasionally stopped in his talk to look at her. She saw and felt those glances as he took in her face and figure. He took her arm once and squeezed it.

"You're not starved," he said.

"I'm not fat, either," she said quickly.

"Just right," he said, and he held on to the arm.

He'd like to kiss me, Emmie said to herself. Shall I let him? . . . She thought she would tell him to stop it if he tried that game, and see what sort of a man he was. She was sensuous enough to like to be mastered by the male, and really hoped he would take no notice of her protestations if he just tried to kiss her.

But whatever stirred him, and Emmie was quite right in her conjectures as to his desires, he did nothing. Perhaps he was shy; perhaps, too, he felt he had too big an advantage as master towards employee, though Emmie was not lacking in independence and could take care of herself.

So he was just agreeable. It was a calm, balmy evening, and the sound of a jackal howling and the roar of an annoyed lion came to them. There were a great many

couples about, most of them arm in arm, or the man with his arm round the lady's waist.

Just before they reached the ballroom, Mr. Tim said: "Going away this wakes?"

"Yes; going to Blackpool."

"Blackpool, eh? . . . Suppose you'll go to the tower."

"I expect so."

He paused.

"I reckon you'll have a good time there."

"I hope so," she said quickly.

He paused again.

"Well, Blackpool's all right for a holiday; not many places can beat it, considering everything."

They danced together again, and Alice came up afterwards and chatted pleasantly. Mr. Tim said:

"I'll have a walk round. I suppose you're staying for the fireworks?"

"Oh! Yes," said Emmie.

"I . . er . . ." he smiled and nodded and went away, breaking off his speech as if prudence or caution tugged him.

When he was alone outside in the fresh air, he felt like a man being drawn in a certain direction, while trying to stay where he was. He wanted to look round to examine more, as a climber looks for the sure foothold and reckons up the chances, being allured all the time by the glory of the view. Desire and something in his mind seemed to be having a tussle.

He could not keep altogether away from that ballroom, and when he put his foot inside it his eyes shot here and there till they discovered Emmie Bollins.

"Funny," he said aloud to himself, when he discovered what he was doing.

And when the fireworks took place, he went to Emmie and Alice and said, "Come on," as if he knew what he wanted. He piloted them to seats, for which he paid. The brilliancy of the fireworks, the realism of the battle scene, the booming cannon, the blazing fortresses, the men flung from battlements, the charge of the victorious soldiers, the triumphant music were all wonderful in their way, but to both Timothy and Emmie they were a secondary affair.

When Emmie reached home she found her father was slightly inebriated, and her mother looking very tired.

Mr. Bollins nodded and muttered something scarcely worth the catching, and closed his eyes again.

"Got back?" said Mrs. Bollins wearily.

"Yes," said Emmie brightly; "Susan in?"

"Yes. She's gone to bed. There's some bread an' cheese an' a tomato, if you want it."

Emmie picked up a piece of bread and cheese.

"I'll just have a bite," she said. "Been to Belle Vue — the fireworks are lovely, Mother."

"Belle Vue, eh. . . . Alice come home with you?"

"Yes. I suppose you're going to bed now, aren't you? I'll light the fire in the morning."

"All right. I shall be goin' in a minute."

"I'm off," said Emmie.

Susan was asleep. Emmie looked at herself in the glass. She had her hat on, and was still proud of it. She was proud of her appearance altogether. She took her hat off, held it out at arm's length and admired it again. She shook it, then looked at herself without it. She examined herself full face, three quarters and profile. She rearranged her hair a little and put her fringe quite

straight; then she put on her hat. She could apparently find no flaw.

When she was in her nightdress and had brushed her thick black hair and it hung loosely on her shoulders, she looked at herself again.

What had he said? "You're not starved. . . ."

Starved . . . she smiled at the irony of the word. She was not of the "fat" type, but starved. . . . No! . . . She saw her breasts, not too big, and nicely rounded, holding out her nightdress; she pulled up a sleeve and looked at her shapely arm. . . .

She stood still, seeing nothing in particular, and thinking nothing coherent, but feeling thrilled with a kind of perfect satisfaction and fiercely happy anticipation. It was something to be good-looking and well-made.

"Come on into bed," muttered Susan, turning over. "What d'you want lookin' at yourself for like that? What's up?"

"Thought you were asleep," said Emmie, beginning to coil up her hair. "Enjoy yourself?"

"Yes. Did you?"

"Er . . . all right," said Emmie.

"Been with a fellow?"

"Er. . . . Been with Alice Cannel."

"Oh! . . . Um . . ." with some expression. "I know. Come on to bed."

Emmie turned out the light and got into bed beside her sister.

Mr. Tim let himself in. He went in the dining-room, turned up the gas, and saw the supper neatly laid out for him by the housekeeper, Mrs. Bane.

He sat in front of it, but did not eat.

His thoughts of Emmie Bollins stifled the desires of



his stomach. He looked serious and somewhat restless, moved by big emotions. He got up, lit a cigarette, and sat down in a big, cosy easy chair. . . .

He sat very quiet till the cigarette was finished, and then he heard a key turn in the lock, and his father came in.

"Hello! . . . Not had your supper yet?" Mr. Booke spoke cheerily, and one could tell from the tone that the father had affection for his son.

"No," said Tim.

"Better get it, hadn't you?"

"Ay," said Tim, adding after a pause, "Just been finishing my cigarette," a lame and unnecessary remark that was thrust out of him because he had been unusually stirred, and felt desirous in some way of covering up the matter.

Mr. Booke, senior, was smoking a cigar, and the perfume pervaded the room powerfully, something like Timothy Booke's personality. He noted the lack of eagerness in his son's attitude.

"Not hungry?"

"No," replied Tim carelessly.

"Been enjoyin' yourself?"

"A bit."

"Eat, lad; it'll do you good. I'm off to bed. 'Night."

"'Night, Father."

But Tim ate very little.

CHAPTER IV

ON Sunday evenings the members of the Booke family used to meet at each others' houses in turn.

Timothy Booke, senior, was the only son, but he had three sisters, two of them married: Jane to a Mr. Holten, a hat manufacturer, Sophie to Mr. Grass, an engineer. Maria was the unmarried one.

The family had been established in Ganton for a number of years, for Timothy's grandfather had founded the business which still flourished as "T. Booke & Son." The Bookes, either in consequence of the old establishment of the family as hat manufacturers, or on account of a simple gift of nature, invariably considered themselves as people of importance. It was not only unwise for anybody who sought peace and pleasantness to pass over the Bookes in any public arrangements, such as the forming of committees for bazaars, sales of work, the management of nursing homes, et cetera — it was not only unwise, it was dangerous. The Bookes had tongues. Also a spirit that was equal to any crisis, and a discomforting capacity for a certain level of sarcasm. It may naturally be concluded that the Bookes held their heads high, insisted on a certain measure of respect, and were not universally loved.

Mrs. Holten was the ablest; a most capable manager, knowing her worth even to the point of appraising it above the general opinion. She could manage almost anything — particularly with that tongue of hers. And one had to concede her ability.

Mrs. Grass was the least pushing, the least bellicose and the happiest. She could take care of herself if she

were thrust into a mêlée or a duel, for that matter, but she avoided the disagreeable if possible.

Miss Booke was, perhaps, the bitterest of the three. They had all tempers (though Mrs. Grass's was quickly spent), but Miss Booke could hold on for years. "Speak first. . . . Never!" That was her attitude. She used to live with her brother after his wife died, but two such stubborn souls as Timothy and Maria Booke were too inflammable to live together. The difference arose, the dispute was born, the row supervened and the sulk entered upon the scene.

The position was intolerable, since Maria was keeping home for Timothy. Mrs. Holten and Mrs. Grass intervened, and Maria decided to live in a little house by herself.

"I'm going," she said curtly to Timothy, and her lips snapped together after the breaking of the terrible ice of silence.

Timothy, who could preserve an air of taking things easily, said, without emotion, after nodding his head: "I think it's best, Maria."

"Yes." The mouth snapped like a hard door banging.

"Yes." His was longer. "Where are you going?" He was her brother, after all.

"I shall take a house and live by myself."

"Oh! . . . Um. . . . A very good plan, too. Well, you needn't hurry, you know."

So peace was made, but Timothy then got in a working housekeeper, a Mrs. Bane, who had a woman to help her; and Miss Booke installed herself in her little house on Manchester Road where she could see people passing, and found life interesting.

On the Sunday following Timothy junior's visit to Belle Vue the Bookes foregathered at the brother's. The

sisters met at church and came on after the service. They were all well and fairly expensively dressed, and eyed each other's clothes with the natural criticism and curiosity of women as they walked from the church to their brother's house.

"I like that dolman, Maria."

"Yes. I always fancied it. They say bustles are getting less. . . ."

"I hear Mrs. Ginn has got a new sealskin coat, three quarter length; some one said her husband had paid fifty pounds for it. . . ."

"Oh-h. . . . Fifty pounds. . . . Anne will fancy herself, won't she?"

"Is it true that Mr. O'Kelly is engaged to Miss Eccles?" Mr. O'Kelly was the curate.

"I've heard nothing."

"I don't think so, Maria."

"Well, it was Miss Sokes told me. She said she'd seen them together a lot."

"That woman's always seeing things. . . . Miss Eccles is a nice girl . . . will have a bit o' money, too. The Reverend Joe, perhaps, knows what he's after."

"Trust him for that!"

"You know," said Mrs. Holten, "it's time Tim began to think of settling down."

"I wish he'd find a nice wife," said Mrs. Grass.

"I know the girl that would just suit him," said Miss Booke.

"Who's that?" asked Mrs. Holten quickly. "Ellen Quillan?"

"Yes."

There was a slight pause. They had talked of Ellen Quillan before, in this connection.

"Y-yes," said Mrs. Holten. "She's a nice girl . . . a very nice girl."

"And well off — and a lady," said Miss Booke.

"Does Tim care for her?" asked Mrs. Grass.

Miss Booke sniffed quickly.

"I don't see why he shouldn't."

"There's this to be said: Timothy would like it," added Mrs. Holten.

"I should think so, indeed," said Miss Booke, who had set her heart on this match, and pressed it to the point of tactlessness, as is frequently the way with match-makers.

"Have you heard about William Seddon's son?" asked Mrs. Grass.

"What about him — you mean his eldest — the one that travels?"

"Yes. He's married a barmaid."

"Eh. T't, t't." Both Jane and Maria shook their heads. There were more clicks of the tongue, "T't . . . t't . . . t't. . . ."

"These young chaps . . . a barmaid. What *does* his father say?"

"He's very upset, I believe," said Mrs. Grass.

"Upset, indeed. . . . A barmaid. I hope to goodness Tim won't do a thing like that. Thank Heaven! he doesn't go much to public-houses, according to all accounts. If Tim married a barmaid or anybody like that, I should . . . er, I don't know . . . feel that ashamed I'd never want to speak to him again."

"And wouldn't people talk," said Mrs. Holten.

"They would that," said Miss Booke. "And some of them wouldn't mind if Timothy Booke's son did make a fool of himself."

"I never think it matters much," said Mrs. Grass, "if they're nice."

"I shouldn't call a barmaid nice," snapped Miss Booke.

"She might be, Maria," said Mrs. Grass. "Wasn't — isn't that a fine show of roses that Timothy's got?"

They were just now in full view of their brother's house — to them, the home of the Booke family.

Helston House stood by itself, in about half an acre of ground. The garden was well kept, about one-half being taken up by a lawn with a flower bed round it and the other half, separated by a neatly trimmed privet hedge, being devoted to the service of the kitchen. The house was plain and unpretentious, but it had served plain and unpretentious people in the past and was solid on its foundations, and comfortably and substantially furnished. It stood at the corner of Silton Street and Davy Street, about a dozen or fifteen yards on high ground from the sidewalk.

As one faced it, the garden lay to the left of the house, the lawn abutted onto the street, being firmly divided from it by a wall and a stout iron railing. Behind were the works. There was an entrance, really the main entrance for it was the most imposing, to the house in Silton Street, but one could also enter by a door in Davy Street, or at the back. The three sisters went in by the principal door.

Mrs. Bane, the housekeeper, opened the door. She was always disturbed with mixed feelings on the Sunday Mr. Timothy entertained his sisters, for she knew very well she had three — for a surety, two — keen-eyed, keen-tongued women in the house, who would notice at once any falling off from a high standard of domestic ability, point it out and criticise freely and frankly. The mixed feelings came from the fact that Mrs. Bane had a nervous

dread of two of the Booke ladies, and yet a certain pride and confidence in her abilities, which prompted her to feel that they could look as much as they liked, for they'd find nothing to criticise.

She was always scrupulously neat and tidy in her personal appearance on these occasions.

As she opened the door, which caught on the mat, she said, "G'evening, Mrs. Holten, 'evening, Miss Booke, 'evening, Mrs. Grass."

The ladies nodded and said "Good evening," Mrs. Grass the most cordially.

"That door catches," said Miss Booke.

"Yes, it does a bit," replied Mrs. Bane, feeling as if she were being pricked already.

"A bit. . . . It'll wear that mat out if it isn't attended to," said Maria pontifically.

"Does Mr. Booke know?" asked Mrs. Holten.

"Yes," said Mrs. Bane, boiling by this time.

Mrs. Grass said pleasantly: "Have you made your jam yet, Mrs. Bane?"

"Yes, Mrs. Grass. I've done some black currant and strawberry."

"You must let us taste it," said Mrs. Holten quickly.

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Bane, but she added to herself: "Wants to see if she can say if it's too sweet or not sweet enough." "Mr. Booke is in the dining-room," she said, throwing open the door, which was the first one they reached.

The ladies entered majestically.

Mr. Booke was smoking, and did not rise as his sisters entered.

"Ha. . . . You've come," he said.

"Yes," said Mrs. Holten, and she looked round as Mrs. Grass and Miss Booke followed her into the room.

"Well, Timothy, how are you?" said Mrs. Grass.

"I'm all right. Where's Fred?"

"He's gone with Tom for a walk." (Tom was Mr. Holten.) "I thought they might have got here before us."

"Well," he paused; "won't you sit down?"

They settled down after critical glances round the room. Mrs. Grass dropped into an easy chair opposite her brother and smiled. Mrs. Holten sat at the table like a chairwoman with the minutes before her. Miss Booke went to the window.

There were three oil paintings on the walls, representing three generations of Bookes. It must be admitted they looked sturdy men of purpose. The portrait of the grandfather of Timothy had been painted from a small daguerreotype, the others had been done from life (with the aid of photographers) by an artist whom Mr. Booke knew. They were just plain portraits, the character in the faces making them interesting. There was a broad, solid mahogany buffet or sideboard facing the window, with a silver tray set upright, a tantalus and a handsome silver epergne on mats. There was a mirror over the mantelpiece, on which was a marble clock, a pair of silver candlesticks and two Delph ware ornaments. The chairs and couch were mahogany, with horsehair seats — solid and sound. There was a Turkey carpet on the floor and a Persian rug by the fireplace. The paper was flowered but not offensive.

"I always envy you this carpet, Timothy," said Mrs. Holten, tapping her foot on it.

He said nothing.

"So do I," said Mrs. Grass. "Fred says he'll get a Turkey when our's is worn out; how much did you give for this, Timothy?"

"Twenty pound."

"Twenty pounds. . . . It's a lot of money, isn't it? — for a carpet."

"It's worth it," said Mrs. Holten quickly. "They last a lifetime, and they — you do feel so comfortable with them. And they're no worse for cleaning than others."

"Not if you look after them," said Miss Booke. "You know these curtains, Timothy, should be mended before they go to the wash again, or they'll be torn to shreds. They were good curtains, too. . . . I suppose Mrs. Bane'll see to them?"

Timothy went on smoking.

"We were talking about Tim as we came along — is he in?"

"I don't know. He will be soon."

"Oh! I hope he will be."

"Yes," said Mrs. Grass. "I hope he'll come in."

"Isn't it time he got engaged?" Mrs. Holten asked.

"Ask me another," replied Timothy.

"Well, you're his father."

"H'm. I've allus been reckoned that."

"You'd like to see him engaged, wouldn't you?"

"Likin's one thing. . . ." He nodded.

"Have you heard about William Seddon's son?"

"What about him?"

"He's going to marry a barmaid," said Mrs. Grass.

"Oh-h. . . ."

"You wouldn't like Tim to marry a barmaid, I imagine," said Maria Booke.

"Your imagination's right, for once, Maria."

"Well, with these girls in bars. . . ." She shook her head. "I'm sure I don't know but it would be a comfort if Tim were properly engaged to a nice girl."

"Suppose he went and made a fool of himself."

"I don't see any reason to suppose anything of the kind," said Mr. Booke.

"No. Let us hope not," said Mrs. Holten.

"The Seddons will feel it, won't they?" said Miss Booke, almost in the tone of one hoping they would, though she may not have hoped it. "I feel very anxious about Tim sometimes. With these young men. . . . You never know. . . . You never know."

"He can get married any day he likes as far as I'm concerned," said Timothy. "The day he marries I walk out of here; this'll be his — *and* the works. He can live here and carry on the business like I did. I've enough money for what I want and I can do with a bit more time for bowling or watching a bit o' cricket and football. . . . I've told him. So he knows."

"Timothy! That's very generous," said Mrs. Grass. "Give it all up to Tim when he marries? . . ."

"And where would you go and live?" asked Mrs. Holten.

"Somewhere. I'd soon find a place."

"Er . . ." said Miss Booke. "Suppose Tim were to. . . ." She shook her head. "You know, Timothy, Ellen Quillan's just the girl for Tim — she's just the wife for him. She'd manage this house beautifully."

"Perhaps . . . perhaps not. I shan't interfere. I don't interfere in affairs of that kind."

"Suppose he goes and marries a barmaid?"

Timothy hesitated. His mouth was shut tight, and he opened it with a little snap before he spoke.

"That'll be his lookout," he said.

"Ours, too," said Miss Booke quickly.

"Yes. His father's, too," added Mrs. Holten.

Then they were interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Holten and Mr. Grass, who were both wearing frock coats

and white waistcoats. There was quite a stir in the room as they made a "general post" for chairs, and soon afterwards Tim came in, also wearing a frock coat and light waistcoat.

Mrs. Holten said: "Are you going away this wakes, Tim?"

"I might," he said carelessly.

"Where to?"

He did not reply quickly. It was as if he were disinclined to be too much "inquired into."

"I'm not sure yet. If anywhere, I think it will be Blackpool."

"Blackpool," said Miss Booke. "I believe Mrs. Quillan talked of going to Blackpool. If you see them, Tim, you must look after them. . . . Ellen Quillan's a nice girl . . . and she'll have a bit o' money."

Tim smiled.

"I reckon Mrs. Quillan can manage without me," he said.

CHAPTER V

THE next day, Monday, Emmie Bollins put on her best boots, did her hair very carefully and nearly put on her new hat. She, however, decided the old one was quite good enough for the trimming-room. She was very keen on getting as much work as possible between now and the wakes, because the more hats she trimmed the more money she earned, and there were sundry items of finery to be bought as well as the expenses for the trip to Blackpool to be secured. She wondered about Blackpool. . . . What had Mr. Tim said? "Well, Blackpool's all right for a holiday. . . ."

She was not quite sure what it implied, but she had the woman's way of seeing something hidden under words and actions when her interest, and particularly her emotions, were engaged. He had danced with her — looked at her — yes, he had looked at her. . . . And he took her to a seat to watch the fireworks. Well, she was going to Blackpool in any case!

To the other trimmers at Booke & Son's she showed no signs of the thoughts that disturbed her. She was just a little quieter; it wouldn't do, for instance, to play larks of any kind, or act foolishly or indulge in screaming laughter that occasionally echoed in the trimming-room.

She quickly got handed out half a dozen hats by Miss Frisby, and at once got to work on them.

Alice Cannel said: "You're quiet, Emmie."

"Got something to do?"

"Seen Mr. Tim?" Alice whispered.

Emmie coloured.

"No," she said quickly, without raising her head. "Silly fathead!" she called Alice — to herself.

"H'm," sniffed Alice, and she went down to Miss Frisby to get work.

About half an hour later, when Alice and Emmie were both working hard and the needles clicked round every table in the trimming-room, and one of the women was singing in a pleasant mezzo voice,

"Swee-eet Belle Maho-oone,
Swee-eet Belle Maho-oone."

Mr. Tim came in. He was in his shirtsleeves, the white cuffs showing their stiffness midway between his elbow and his wrist. He wore a black apron tied round his waist.

The singing stopped. Some of the trimmers laughed. The singer bent her head as if she didn't like being overheard by Mr. Tim, but secretly wondered if he knew who had been singing, and if he admired the voice.

"Mr. Tim!" whispered Alice to Emmie.

Emmie blushed and her heart beat more strenuously, and she looked up in that furtive way of hers. She must see him. Had he come to have a look at her? . . . Of course he had. He didn't often come to the trimming-room.

"Er," he began, "who's got any hats for Stockley & Co.? They're marked Wolseley 355."

The trimmers began to look at the little square pieces of paper attached to their hats.

Emmie had some. She found a difficulty in speaking and coughed, looking at Mr. Tim and standing up.

He saw her.

"You, eh?"

Alice Cannel bit her lip and hardly dared to look.

"These are Stockley & Co.," said Emmie quietly, speaking very nicely, but without any pronounced affectation.

Mr. Tim looked at the order form and the hat, and then gave a glance at Emmie that seemed to have nothing to do with the business in hand.

"They're not lined, I see," he said.

"No," said Emmie.

"Well, they're wanted quick; have to go away today."

"I've only just got them."

"How many?"

"Six."

"H'm." He looked at her again, as if he would put something more besides business into the interview, but it was of the most shadowy character. Emmie felt it, though probably none of the others save Alice noticed it.

He pointed to Alice: "Suppose you take three apiece — that'll be better, eh? They must be done, and the Midland lurry'll be here by four o'clock. Do 'em between you."

"All right," said Emmie, while Alice at once put on one side the hats she was doing, took three of Emmie's with the trimming, and at once began to work on them. Mr. Tim watched them working a moment, and then went out.

The moment he had gone Alice looked at Emmie and Emmie, feeling scrutiny, looked at Alice.

"That's funny, isn't it?" said Alice.

Emmie simply pulled a face, laughed, and then bent over her work; she felt in a whirl.

And her three hats were not only done on time, but

they were done well, too, with as regular and as even a stitching as the most critical might desire.

Emmie was still perturbed as she went to dinner. She was wondering and imagining and fancying. . . .

Her dinner consisted of cold beef from yesterday's joint, some red cabbage served in a cup without a handle, mashed potatoes and bread and jam. The cutlery was not clean: knives, though washed after use, were only really cleaned occasionally — if they looked very bad. The plates were chipped, odd, cracked and scored. The mashed potatoes were served out of a pan, which remained on the hob during the meal — vegetable dishes were rarely, if ever, used in the Bollins household; washing up was always a calculation.

Emmie ate almost her usual quantity, but she had a feeling that something was going to happen — that, doubtless, accounted for the "almost."

Nothing happened, at any rate, that day. Emmie pursued her trimming and worked at home in the evening on an underskirt she was making for herself, thinking a good deal of the time of Mr. Tim, even as she worked out the details of her next new dress.

In the ordinary course of events Emmie did not see Mr. Tim every day. He came only occasionally to the trimming-room and, unless Emmie happened to meet him as she was going out or coming into the works, she did not come in contact with him. She met him on the Wednesday. He was at the gate when she was going out with Alice Cannel and two of the other trimmers.

He was wearing his black cashmere working jacket and apron, and had his hands in his trousers pockets. There was an air of watchfulness about him, as if there

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was something he particularly wanted to see. Emmie caught sight of him as she emerged from the building, and had time to note the look.

Alice whispered to her: "Mr. Tim."

"Shut up," said Emmie, and she straightened herself and thought: "I am glad I haven't got those old boots on — or that old skirt. . . . I wonder if. . . ." She got no further with definite ideas; she was too intent on the occasion. She looked at Tim and then on the ground and then at him again.

He stood very stolidly, but he marked Emmie well. He nodded as they were passing.

"G'night."

"Good night," they all said, and Emmie looked straight into his eyes for one brief moment, and then swiftly on the ground.

He made a slight motion, as if in answer to an impulse of sorts, and then stood still.

Emmie turned round as she got farther down the road, and Alice Cannel and one of the trimmers left her. Mr. Tim was still there.

It was on the Wednesday before the wakes that Emmie spoke to Mr. Tim again. She had been expecting to speak to him every day she had gone to the works since that "Belle Vue" Saturday — a Saturday very memorable to her now — and had tried various times of going and coming to give opportunity and Mr. Tim every indulgence.

She returned a little sooner than usual on Wednesday after dinner, and was stirred with a glorious emotion when she saw Mr. Tim standing by the big gate leading to the works. "He's there," she said to herself, and at once she began to congratulate herself she was as neatly

dressed as she had ever been in her working clothes.

Mr. Tim was standing without apron, smoking his pipe.

Emmie looked at him boldly.

He gave her the very slightest of nods, and did not take off his hat.

"Well," he said, and it was enough to make her stand still.

He paused.

She looked at him and smiled.

"Made up your mind yet where you're going this wakes?"

"Yes. I told you."

"Blackpool?"

"Yes."

"Going with . . . Alice Cannel?"

"Yes."

He spoke deliberately.

"Are you going to be with her all the time?"

"I don't know; I shall have to be with her sometimes. . . . Why?"

She felt very daring and cunning as she put this question.

He looked at her with admiring eyes and very pleasantly.

"Oh! . . . I might be going to Blackpool too. . . . Only, of course, if you're going to be a Siamese Twin with Alice Cannel . . . well. . . ."

"I didn't say I was going to be a Siamese Twin, or whatever you call it. I expect I can leave her when I want and go on my own. Alice isn't soft. . . . She'll soon pick up a chap there, for that matter." Emmie laughed.

So did Mr. Tim. He liked Emmie's directness and

frankness. She met him half way, and yet there was an air of independence both in her bearing and speech that appealed to him. There was willingness but no obsequiousness.

"Are you going to pick up a chap too?" he asked.

Emmie shook her head.

"They are to be picked up easy enough," she said.

"H'm," he paused. "Well, er — look here; I'm going to Blackpool too. Are you waiting till Saturday, or what? I'm going on Friday night."

"Alice and I wanted to go on Friday if we could — there's a tram about 7:45 from Victoria."

"H'm. . . . You can get off right enough. Ask for your money. Tell Miss Frisby to get your book made up and then Mason'll pay you. And, er . . . I'll be sure to meet you then. You can tell Miss Frisby I said you could go on Friday." He nodded pleasantly. "See you Saturday morning, then."

"Right," she said, and gave him another glance from her dark eyes for remembrance, and went on into the yard of the hat works, up the dirty stone steps to her place in the trimming-room, saying to herself: "He's going to meet me on the pier. . . . What's he after? Is he? . . . Is he? . . ." And then, after the waves of emotion and the big and beautiful speculations had all merged into a feeling of glorious satisfaction, she said to herself: "Well, I know this much — no chap, and Mr. Tim amongst 'em, is going to make a fool of me!"

She picked up a hat and began to work at it, as she recalled Mr. Tim at the gate, his look, his attitude, his tone. "He was waiting for me," she said to herself. "He was that. . . . Well, if he's after me, he'll marry me. . . ."

There were trimmers at work when Emmie reached

her own particular place, for they, being independent of machinery, and also being piece-workers, could fling their energies into their labour during the whole of the dinner hour if they wished. As many of them brought their dinners with them, having them warmed at a cottage near and eating them in the workroom, it frequently happened that work went on in the trimming-room while the men were resting.

Emmie's early return consequently created no surprise and called forth no comment — except from Alice Cannel. She was Emmie's friend, and knew her.

When she came back from dinner she lost no time in getting to her place. She put her feet on the low ledge that ran under the table, pulled her skirt around her and took up a hat which had the trimmings inside it. As she bit a piece of thread she said to Emmie:

"You came back soon."

"Not that soon," said Emmie, without raising her head.

"Go on with you. I looked up and down and waited a bit, and I was soon."

"Well . . . perhaps I was. We can go on Friday."

"Oh! Who said so?"

Emmie hesitated.

"Mr. Tim."

"Oh! . . . Did he? When did you see him?"

"After dinner."

"Oh! . . . So that's why you were soon, is it?"

"You ought to be jolly glad I asked him," said Emmie, blushing slightly and thrusting in her needle in and out again smartly.

"So I am. But. . . . Mr. Tim, eh?"

Emmie leaned forward and whispered:

"He's going to Blackpool too."

"Is he?"

"Uh. I say! You won't mind if I go out with him a bit?"

"Has he asked you?"

"Yes."

"Does he know I'm going?"

"Yes."

Alice paused — a little affected by jealousy, but very slightly. She was good-natured, though, and replied: "Go as much as you like. I can soon find somebody. But . . . you remember Mary Ford?"

"What about her?"

Alice nodded significantly.

"Five shillings a week," she winked.

Emmie looked angry.

"If you think ——"

"Go on! I'm only warning you!"

"I can take care of myself. I'm not Mary Ford."

After a pause, Alice said softly: "Mr. Tim going, eh? . . . What will Mr. Booke say?"

That was what Emmie was wondering.

CHAPTER VI

EMMIE'S luggage was easily contained in a fair-sized cardboard box, and looked neat enough encased in brown paper held secure by a couple of straps joined by a leather handle. Alice Cannel carried similar luggage. They were both excited for they had had a complete change of clothes and felt very clean and spruce and well adorned. Alice called for Emmie, and as the two walked down Silton Street carrying their bags, Mrs. Bollins stood at the door and watched them go with a certain pride. Mrs. Grey, across the road, nodded towards the girls and shouted:

"Off for the wakes?"

"Yes!" shouted Mrs. Bollins.

"Where to?"

"Blackpool."

"Oh! well . . . it wants a bit o' beatin'. . . . Emmie looks well. . . ."

"Yes."

The two women watched the two girls turn out of Silton Street to get into Manchester Road on their way to the station.

Emmie and Alice were certainly conscious of their appearance as they were stirred by their adventure.

"Wonder if the rooms'll be all right," said Alice.

"Should be," said Emmie. "Mrs. James said she'd been four years running."

"That sounds good enough. Have you brought anything with you?"

"A bit o' tea and sugar, and some boiled ham. Mother

said it would save us going out getting something for supper. And this is all right: it's from Mrs. Brown's."

"That corner shop?"

"Yes."

They hurried out the station to catch the train, for which they would have to wait at least half an hour at the rate at which they were walking, but excitement goaded them on.

Emmie said nothing of one particular hope or expectation that moved her as they waited on the platform at Ganton Station, but Alice maybe divined it, for she said:

"I wonder if Mr. Tim's going by this train?"

"I don't know," said Emmie, with as much carelessness in the tone as she could fairly assume.

Mr. Tim, however, did not go by that train. He had originally intended to do so, but the presence of Alice made him decide to go by an earlier one. Tim was one of those people who, without being too assertive or dominating or selfish, could make up his mind not only as to the things he wanted but also as to those he did not want. He wanted Emmie, and not Emmie and Alice. Occasionally he felt he might have to put up with a little of Alice, but he realised that a journey to Blackpool just now, in probably a full carriage, with Alice and Emmie, would not give him the satisfaction he desired.

The two girls managed very well. They arrived at Talbot Road, Blackpool, after a journey that might be described as uneventful, but which, to them, was crammed with a suggestive excitement and adventure.

At Blackpool, men offering to carry their parcels were quietly ignored and Emmie, getting directions from a policeman, led the way to the lodgings which had been recommended them.

There they shared a bedroom, sleeping together in the

same bed, and were allotted places at the dining-table in the common room, where other lodgers, like themselves, paid for lodgings and bought their own food which the landlady prepared, thus giving the board at meal time an appearance of variety in diet that was striking and interesting.

It was not till the following morning that Emmie met Mr. Tim. Alice behaved very well, though she had just a slight feeling of jealousy and of being neglected, but was pleasant at Emmie's departure.

"You take care of yourself," she said.

"Go on with you," replied Emmie.

"Oh! Ay. . . . Half past twelve dinner, mind."

"I won't forget."

Emmie walked with the pride of the well dressed and the independence of her northern working race and spirit. She was wearing a pretty soft-flowered dress, which fitted tightly to the waist, having about half a dozen small pleats running from the neck, and lace on the right side where it fastened. The sleeves were tight and finished just below the elbow, where there was more lace. On the right hand side the dress seemed lifted artistically where it was crowned by a bow, and the plain pleated skirt showed from about three or four inches on her left side to about eighteen on her right. Her hat was a straw, the shape of a plant pot with a narrow brim, and had a bow and a feather in front. The dress was, of course, very full from the waist, as it was thrust out by the bustle of the period.

She was neatly shod, and carried a parasol, on the handle of which there was a pink bow.

Mr. Tim was waiting on the pier, and felt a thrill of delight when he saw her. He noticed her walk and her face first. It was Emmie herself that struck home. But

as he noticed the dress he felt pleased to see that Emmie could dress. She would disgrace nobody. She could walk out with anybody. . . .

She came to him, smiling.

He met her with a frank, genuine welcome, but did not touch his hat, neither did they shake hands.

"You've got here?"

"Looks like it," she replied.

"H'm. . . . Lot o' people about, aren't there?"

"Yes. Our train was full. What time did you come?"

"I came by the 5:20. That was full too. Got a new frock on?" He talked calmly, almost deliberately, but roamed over her with his eyes.

"Yes. Do you like it?"

"Yes."

They began to walk up and down, both feeling in a mood above that of ordinary holiday makers. They looked at the rolling blue sea, and were content to watch wave after wave rise and fall, merely making occasional remarks, such as, "That's a big one. . . ." "Looks fine. . . ." And, "This air's good," from him.

Emmie was saying to herself: He's gone on me. . . . I wonder? As if she were calculating a little. But she had perfect confidence in herself, and her unspoken resolution was: But he's not going to make a fool of me.

Tim was just happy. He was in love with Emmie and fully realised it. He was thoroughly enjoying himself in her society on that Blackpool pier when he made remarks about the sea, the air, the people that passed, the folk they saw on the sands or anything or anybody else. He was happy because Emmie was his companion and gave him, by her demeanour, a fair assurance that she

would acquiesce in his ultimate desires. He was naturally a little more excited than was customary with him, but gave no observer — other than Emmie — any hint of that. He appeared calm, well-to-do, solid, satisfied, bent on holiday-making, and starting with perfect reasonableness by having a blow on the pier and a look round.

All about were other people in twos and threes and batches and alone. Many of them had the air of those who were newcomers, but there were others sporting about with familiar airs, denoting that this walk on the pier was getting quite a common thing to them. Emmie noticed these and saw in their behaviour something very enticing. It seemed to suggest the lengthened stay at the seaside — a week, two weeks, even. Imagine staying for two whole weeks at Blackpool! The idea was luxurious. None of Emmie's friends ever stayed more than four days — five was a special and an almost extravagant affair. In fact, many of the Ganton hat manufacturers, like Mr. Booke, for instance, rarely went away for more than ten days at a time.

And yet Emmie felt no envy for these favoured ones. She was interested as she heard a group chatter gaily about some excursion taken last week and fix a new one for next week, but had no envy. What was going to be her fate? Would she some day be as well-off as they? . . . They could talk about their excursions if they wanted to. . . . She was in a mood to make small stuff of casual excursions.

That was the thought that came to her more than any other. In various expressions of course. It simply meant: Is Mr. Tim serious? What does he really mean? And if he is serious! . . . The height was almost dizzying.

And all the time he flung over her looks that were a

frank confession of liking and approval and satisfaction. But rich young men had shown likings for working girls before. . . .

So Emmie had doubt and fear mingled every now and then with her hope and confidence, though whenever Mr. Tim spoke to her she felt serenely comfortable. He was so easy and cosy, so to speak, and yet flung into his manner an intimacy of expression that could be felt, if not explained, to a third person.

Their talk was a mere meandering stream of commonplaces. There was so much of the unusual to attract them both that simple comments were natural and spontaneous.

Once Tim, as he leaned over the pier, got hold of Emmie by the arm.

"Look," he said.

Emmie turned at once. It was merely a boat being rowed near the pier.

"M-m," she said.

Tim made some remark, but what Emmie noticed most was that he still held her arm. There was no necessity for him to keep her to the position, and both he and she knew it. Also both pretended to ignore what was happening.

But Emmie noted the incident and wondered if it really was an indication of something deep and serious. . . .

The sea rolled past the supports of the pier with an uncanny power, giving them the idea that no human being could hope to withstand it if it came to a struggle. And yet there were people in small boats managing to do what they wanted on the tops of these very waves. It was all right if you behaved properly and knew what to do. . . . The reflection seemed to Emmie a kind of augury and

comfort. Well, she knew what she wanted, and she thought she knew how to behave. . . .

And Tim still held her arm. She felt him looking at her and turned her eyes towards him. There was no need for her to be told of his love for her — that was as patent as the power and vitality of the rolling sea. The sudden conviction stirred her. She felt a strange emotion move within her. She did not withdraw her gaze, but its simple curiosity was softened. She smiled, with hints in those expressive eyes of hers.

He pressed her arm and seemed to get closer to her.

"Go on," she whispered. "There's folk about."

"What does it matter?" he murmured.

She felt it did not really matter at all, in view of what was at stake; but still, it did not do to say such things.

"What shall we do this afternoon?"

The very idea was joy to her, for it showed he was so happy, in her society, he wished to be with her almost continuously.

"There's Alice, you know," she said.

"What's she got to do with it?"

Emmie smiled a little. She knew Alice would stand no chance against this great circumstance; but then, it would not do to express herself too boisterously just yet. Mr. Tim could be himself (if he were not playing a game), but she had to be wary and indulge in calculation.

"Well," she said, pausing a little and using her eyes both for observation and effect, "I must be with her sometimes."

"You're with her enough in Ganton."

"Oh, yes, but we've come here together, haven't we?"

"I suppose so. But she's probably off with some chap and doesn't want you."

"In that case, of course——"

"Look here, Emmie, we'll go to-night, in any case, to Raikes Hall, eh?"

"To-night?"

"Yes."

"All right. There's dancing, isn't there?" This was very alluring.

"Yes."

They arranged to meet in the evening, so as to go to Raikes Hall together, which was, at that time, one of the most popular of Blackpool attractions.

And now they began to walk up and down the pier. Tim talked just as naturally as if he and Emmie had been walking on a Blackpool pier for the hundredth time. Emmie could not forget him and lose herself in the surroundings. She was far more interested in the people near her, and in Mr. Tim, than in the numerous incidents to which Tim kept calling her attention. She was all observation and a desire to be observed. She was noting dress and walks and speech and Mr. Tim and his behaviour, and was very interested when he took off his hat to somebody.

Emmie turned quickly, and then feeling she must not behave as if filled to overflowing with curiosity, averted her eyes, somewhat dissatisfied that she had not seen well who were those people to whom Mr. Tim raised his hat. A mother and daughter. . . . Emmie fancied she knew them. She hesitated to ask out of a little diffidence —a disinclination to seem too curious, to pry, particularly lest it might excite derision or contempt or a feeling of simple disapproval in Tim.

She looked at him.

He had a curious look on his face — only to be noted by some one as keenly interested in him as Emmie was.

She had to ask: "Who was that?"

He paused.

"Don't you know them?"

Emmie turned, very glad of the excuse, but too many people intervened now for her to see the two ladies well.

"No," she said. "I can't see them now."

"They're Gantonians."

"Well, who are they?"

He laughed, realising from her tone he was teasing her a little.

"It's Mrs. Quillan and her daughter," he said, after a pause.

"What — oh. . . . Live in Stockport Road."

"Yes."

"Them, eh? . . ." And at once Emmie lost herself in speculation. Mrs. Quillan and her daughter. . . . They had seen Mr. Tim with her. . . . He had raised his hat and didn't seem to mind having been seen with her — Emmie Bollins — at all.

She felt greatly elated, and could have taken Mr. Tim's arm with a little encouragement, and might actually have done so if Mrs. Quillan and her daughter had passed them again at that moment.

So far as Emmie was concerned this little incident was really the most impressive of the morning. The great moving billowy sea, with its infinite suggestiveness, faded into a mere insignificance besides Mr. Tim's attitude as he walked with her and took his hat off to Mrs. and Miss Quillan.

Mr. Tim didn't mind being seen with her by Gantonians who knew him — that was evident. On the contrary, if Emmie was any judge of an expression at all, he had seemed to be almost pleased at the meeting, and

had certainly not appeared embarrassed or awkward, or shown any desire to leave Emmie's side.

He said to her before parting: "Now don't go and fix up anything with Alice Cannel for to-morrow."

Of course, she was pleased to hear him say that, and looked at him boldly with a smile.

"Yes, but I must be with her a bit."

She laughed, being very happy.

"Yes, but ——"

"Not so many buts, now."

"That's all very well, but I've come with her."

"You can go back with her, too, for that matter, but I'm having you while you're here, so you can let her know."

The speech was direct, and bordered on the proprietary; but as no words of love had yet been spoken, Emmie was still feeling the need to struggle a little for definiteness.

"M-m," she said, looking pert.

"You understand?"

"What are you after?" she ventured, a little timidly.

"You," he said quickly.

She did not dare to ask more. In a way it was enough, but in another way it was not. She was wanted. . . . Yes, but . . .

She looked at him searchingly, and he felt the power of her eyes.

"You can be with her, if you like, this afternoon, but let that finish it. And it's Raikes Hall to-night, mind."

She nodded, still gazing at him probingly.

Emmie was still in a whirl of uncertainty as she went into her lodgings. There was no doubt about Mr. Tim's attitude. He wanted her. He said so and showed it.

But did he mean marriage? That was the great question. If he did. . . . Suppose he did. . . . Mrs. Timothy Booke. . . .

She was wondrously excited as she thought of that, but not at all dismayed or hesitant. There was no quailing at the height, no doubt as to competency. She at once began to comfort and encourage herself by remembering that the wives of some of the rich men in Ganton had been in as humble a way as herself when they were married.

Alice Cannel met her with: "Well. . . . Been with him?"

"Yes."

"Going again?"

"Yes. Here, Alice, do you mind if I'm with him a lot?"

Alice couldn't at once be magnanimous. She said: "Seems funny coming with me and then going off all the time by yourself."

"Well, you see how it is."

And Alice, her momentary chill over, replied gaily: "It's all right, Emmie. You go. But what's he after? Is he going to marry you?"

Emmie was silent.

"Don't let him play any tricks on you," said Alice. "It's all very well for them ——"

"D'you think I'm a fool?" said Emmie quickly.

"Go on with you. There's many a girl as thought herself very smart as has been fooled by a chap. If he says nothing, ask him what his game is."

"He's all right," said Emmie quietly, still desiring very greatly, and still unable to get rid of the haunting fear.

"Let's hope so. If he does want to marry you. . . . It . . . Eh? ——"

"Oh! Be quiet," said Emmie, half afraid of spoiling the dream by discussing it.

"Well, Emmie, I wish you luck. I say! I picked up such a nice chap this morning. Came from Stockport. I think he's a traveller at a hat works there; funny, isn't it? But he was dancing about me. . . . I dunno. . . . I'm seeing him to-night. We're going to the Winter Gardens for a skate or else to Raikes Hall."

It was during the dancing at Raikes Hall that Emmie managed to fling away the doubt that had harassed her.

Mr. Tim had met her with a patent joy in the greeting.

"Well, told Alice?" he said.

"Yes."

"That's right. What did you do this afternoon?"

"Walked about."

"Who with?"

"Myself."

"What!"

She laughed.

"I'd like to shake you," he said, and she was delighted. "I suppose she got off with somebody else?"

"She knows somebody here, and we met him."

He took her arm again, and when they got amongst the crowd at Raikes Hall, he said: "Well, I know you like dancing."

"Do you?" she answered roguishly.

"Yes," and he forthwith put an arm around her waist, making her dance almost before she was ready.

She liked the masterfulness, and as she thoroughly enjoyed the dance, it was no wonder there was a flush of gorgeous pleasure on her cheek when the dance was over.

"By Gum! You look well," he said.

She stroked her cheeks.

"A bit warm, isn't it?" she said.

"Yes. Let's have a bit of a stroll."

He led her along the path in the open to a seat under the shadow and shelter of a tree.

It was a beautiful soft August evening. There was a hum of voices and gladness in the air. The livid moon looked austere in its beauty and loneliness. The leaves of the trees scarcely stirred in the calm air, while the occasional laughs and footfalls of the happy holiday-makers came to Tim and Emmie with an almost regular plentitude.

"Sit down."

As he sat beside her he looked at her and then put his arm round her, pulled her face to him and kissed her.

Her heart was beating wildly. She looked at him timidly, almost pleadingly. She was breathing fast.

"You're a bonny 'un, Emmie," he said, with a lover's voice.

"What are you after," she muttered, worming herself a little closer, while her hand seemed to creep up as a sign of either protest or willingness.

"Why, you. . . . What. . . . I'm going to marry you — that'll suit you, won't it?"

Her breath came in gasps but she nodded eagerly, and when he kissed her again he felt she was kissing him too, with a burning passion.

"I said to myself I'd have you, when I met you at Belle Vue."

"Did you?" she said, still most excited and revelling in the situation and resting her hand in his.

"I did. I'll buy you a ring on Monday — or when we get back; buy you a better one in Manchester than here," and he pulled her to him and kissed her again.

CHAPTER VII

EMMIE'S visit to Blackpool in the August of 1885 left a picture in her mind at once blurred and vivid, and altogether unforgettable. It was like a gorgeous sunset in which everything is subordinate to the blazing sun. In Emmie's memory there were vague people on a vague pier, rows of vague oyster stalls, a place called Uncle Tom's Cabin, where she had danced, some gipsies on the south shore, but a very definite place called Raikes Hall, and a great outstanding fact — Mr. Tim Booke was going to marry her.

Of course he called her Emmie easily enough, for he had called her that at the works whenever he had had occasion to address her, but she found it just a trifle awkward to call him "Tim." She boggled at it for a time, and said nothing in the way of a name, contenting herself with raising her voice or just saying "Here!" . . .

But she saw that familiarity was all to her advantage, and so boldly said "Tim" one afternoon. After that it seemed to Emmie that all the King's horses and all the King's men could not drag her from her thrilling joy. For she was thrilled. The thrills kept coming to her, like companies at a march past. "Mrs. Timothy Booke. . . . Mrs. Timothy Booke. . . . What will Mrs. So and So say? And Mary X? And the Y's? . . . In the trimming-room, too. . . ." That was one triumphal tune. Another was headed by the usual "Mrs. Timothy Booke. Where shall we live? No more trimming. . . . The minister coming to see me. . . . Eee! . . ." And another: "We shall be called in church. . . . They'll

all hear it. . . . Timothy Booke and Emily Bollins. . . ."

Thrills! They seemed at first unending. Emmie was in Elysium. She was so stirred with emotion that there was a danger, on occasions, of her forgetting Mr. Tim himself in the things he represented, for he represented so very much to Emmie.

However, that was only in the early days, for though some of the pictures recurred again and again, the familiarity with Mr. Tim at last let Emmie realise him more and more as man and lover, and not the mere carrier of gorgeous things to her. She properly appraised his level-headedness; she felt he was no fool; he could be trusted to do the sensible thing; he was kind, too, not mean; pleasant, not bad-tempered and not given to getting drunk.

Alice had received the news fairly well. She was inclined to be a little jealous and realised she had been easily outdistanced by Emmie, for there was no denying the substantiality of Mr. Tim, nor his standing in Ganton (and if a man stood well in Ganton, he stood well in Lancashire; and if well in Lancashire, then . . . anywhere). Emmie, as Mrs. Timothy Booke, would be a person of importance. Alice hung for a trifle on a mere nodding of her head. Emmie to have got Mr. Tim. . . . She wished she had had luck like that — not necessarily Mr. Tim, but something like it. But she said candidly: "Well, good luck to you, Emmie. Mr. Tim's all right. . . . And he *will* marry you?"

"Yes. A'M't I telling you?"

"H'm. Well, I wish you luck, I do indeed. Nobody else in t' trimming-room'll do as well, so you can flatter yourself with that. You'll let it out, won't you?"

"Ye-es. Why not?"

"If I were in your place I'd tell everybody; you have no secret about it. I wonder what Miss Booke'll say?"

"What can she say?" said Emmie quickly.

"Nothing, of course, against you. I'm not meaning that. Only, you know what the Bookes are — particularly that Miss Booke, with her nose up."

"Mrs. Holten's got a tongue with a bit of a file on it," said Emmie.

"Never you mind," said Alice. "Once you're married you can put your fingers to your nose at Mrs. Holten and Miss Booke and all the lot of 'em. . . . I wonder where you'll live. . . . And what will they say at home, eh? Tell me what he said to you, Emmie, when he said he'd marry you?"

"He said he was going to marry me."

"Them words?"

"Yes."

"Oh! . . ."

"He said he'd made up his mind when he met me at Belle Vue — you remember?"

"If I didn't think it! I said he was gone on you then. Well. . . . At any rate, here's luck!" Alice kissed her friend. "I suppose you'll keep on coming to the trimming-room till you're properly married?"

"Why not? Got to live, haven't I?"

After the wakes, when work was resumed in the Ganton hat factories, Mr. Tim and Emmie went about their business at "T. Booke & Son's" just as they had done before these momentous holidays had come.

But things were not the same. Alice was delighted to be the bearer of surprising news. There was no reason for Emmie to hold her tongue, but she found no necessity to be eager to proclaim the news; her service was

principally to confirm the oft-repeated question: "I hear as you're going to marry Mr. Tim"—or "young Mr. Tim." To her family Emmie was explicit. Mrs. Bollins looked very proud, with a suspicion of anxiety.

"Mr. Tim?" she repeated.

"Yes," from Emmie.

"And he said he'd marry you?"

"Yes."

"Er. . . . Well, I'm glad. His, er. . . . There's, er. . . . It's, er. . . ."

Emmie was frank.

"Oh, you needn't think, Mother, he's forced to marry me. You might just as well speak out. I'm not one of that sort, and you ought to know me by now. He's going to marry me because he wants to, and if I never saw him again; well — there'd be no disgrace."

"Don't get excited, Emmie; I didn't mean anything wrong, and I'm very glad. Mr. Tim. . . . He's a nice, gentlemanly man. . . . Nicer than his father, for that matter. What do they say in th' trimming-room?"

"I don't know. . . . And care less," said Emmie.

Mr. Tim made no pretence of asking the consent of Mr. and Mrs. Bollins: he took it for granted. He and Emmie had agreed to get married, and practically, he considered nobody else had any consent to give or withhold. He did not even call at the Bollins' for a little time. When he wished to make an appointment with Emmie he would waylay her as she was going out or coming into the works, and say quite casually: "To-night, about nine — top of Town Lane?" Or: "Windmill Lane to-morrow night, about half past eight." Or on a Saturday he would say, perhaps: "Let's go to Manchester to-night; there's a good thing on at the

Theatre Royal. Catch the half past six tram. I'll get on at the Station. . . ."

And Emmie invariably acquiesced. She never made difficulties or hesitated, but just smiled and said "Yes." When she was with him on any of these excursions she was always thoroughly happy. It would not be correct to say she forgot altogether the great fact that she was engaged to the son of a hat manufacturer, some one, at any rate, much better off financially and socially than herself — but it sank oftener than not into a feeling of general content in Tim's presence. He was "nice"; he had a pleasant, jolly way, and could lead, guide and protect as well as make her feel now and then that there were things almost entirely in her province which he looked to her to do. He was very rarely ill-tempered, and as time passed Emmie grew more and more to like and really to love him.

But meanwhile the rumour of the engagement spread. There were, of course, the topics of conversation, and doubtless plenty of other rumours to compete with or accompany this, but Tim's engagement to Emmie Bollins, "one of the trimmers," was an item worth passing on.

"I hear young Tim Booke's walking out with one of their trimmers — Emmie Bollins —" that was as often as not the manner of the news-bearer. Details and confirmation followed. A had seen them together. B thought he (or she) had.

And of course rumour was not going to stop on the doorstep of Miss Booke's, for instance, or Mrs. Holten's, or Mrs. Grass's, or Mr. Booke's, Senior, for that matter.

Miss Booke actually got the news first — and got it from her charwoman, of all people! "Was it true that

Mr. Timothy Booke's son was walkin' out wi' Sam Bollins' daughter?"

Miss Booke said "What!" and hoped not, indeed. But she had no sooner heard the various corroborative details: "So and So had seen them together in Blackpool. So and So had seen them in Manchester. So and So had had the news from Mrs. Bollins herself. And it was all over Booke & Son's! . . ."

Miss Booke had a lively sense of the adage that there is not, at any rate, a great quantity of smoke without fire of some kind. This was what she had dreaded. Tim walking out with a trimmer. . . . Bollins — she tried to recall the Bollins family and remembered Mr. Bollins, in dirty shirtsleeves, with a dirty apron in front of him, a wishywashy-looking chap; looked as if he wanted a tonic and a good shaking. . . . *His* daughter! Miss Booke then had a recollection of Emmie, the trimmer. . . . That little black-eyed creature, eh! Suppose she'd been leering at Tim, and he, like a young fool, had been paying her some attention, perhaps gone a walk with her. . . . Well, from a walk in a lane to a walk down the aisle of a church was sometimes a long way . . . and sometimes not. . . . She wondered. . . . It might be cheap at fifty or a hundred pounds. . . . Her brother would see to that. Tim marrying a trimmer when there was Ellen Quillan waiting for him . . . a girl like Ellen Quillan, a lady, and with money, and he must needs go and walk out with a trimmer. Oh! these young chaps; what fools they could make of themselves.

Miss Booke was dreadfully worried all day, and worried to an almost exasperating point because she could not go and talk the matter over with any other member of her family and leave Mrs. Grundy, the charwoman,

in the house. She'd never done that yet, and wasn't going to begin for all the nephews in the world.

But the moment Mrs. Grundy had gone, Miss Booke put on her bonnet — ladies of a certain age wore bonnets in those days — and went with firm step, mouth tightly shut and head erect, to her sister's, Mrs. Holten's.

Mrs. Holten looked up as Miss Booke entered the kitchen.

"Hello! I thought this was your day for Mrs. Grundy."

"So it is."

"Oh! . . . Nothing wrong, is there?" she asked, seeing obvious news in her sister's face.

Miss Booke held her lips tightly shut for a moment, and then said: "Nothing wrong. . . . Isn't there? Well, I hope not. I do, indeed; I do, indeed. Are they all out?"

"Ye-es. Come in the drawing-room. It's nothing serious, is it?" Mrs. Holten went with a quick, brisk step into the richly furnished, rarely used drawing-room. She waited till her sister was inside, and then shut the door.

"I always like your drawing-room, Jane," said Miss Booke; "it looks rich some way ——"

"Yes, but ——"

"Um. Tim's walking out with a trimmer — one of our trimmers: that Bollins' daughter."

Mrs. Holten frowned and pressed her lips together. There was silence for a moment.

"Walking out. . . . What does that mean?" she asked sharply.

"It means that Tim means to marry the girl if he isn't stopped."

Both pairs of lips seemed to shut tight after a speech

and both ladies looked capable of saying and of doing much if they could.

"Walking out with a daughter of Sam Bollins. . . . I know her — Emmie Bollins. . . . She's a good-looking girl; just the kind Tim would fancy. Eh, dear! These young fellows! How did you find it out?"

Miss Booke related all the details she had heard from Mrs. Grundy, and Mrs. Holten was impressed.

She made melancholy noises with her tongue. "T't, t't, t't. . . . What *will* folks say?"

"What won't they?" snapped Miss Booke.

"Tim Booke's marrying one of his father's trimmers. His father-in-law's that Samuel Bollins. Have you been to see Timothy yet?"

"How could I? I've just left Mrs. Grundy to come straight to you."

"Well, I didn't know; you might have been to see Timothy first." They were both a little irritable. "We must go and see Timothy at once; it must be stopped, if possible. I'd give twenty pounds before I'd see Tim marry that girl. . . . And Ellen Quillan there waiting. . . . We shall be the laughing stock of the place. I'll come with you now, Maria; we'll see Timothy, and Tim, if need be."

"Tim can be stubborn when he likes."

"Yes. And he can be a fool, too, apparently."

Mrs. Holten lost no time in getting ready to go out with her sister, and as they walked into Silton Street towards their brother's house, they dropped into a meditative silence. They had expressed their fears — principally fears that people who knew them would pour on them a kind of scorn, and hold up to lightness and ridicule the Booke family — and now it seemed as if they had to dwell on the bitter situation.

Of the two, Mrs. Holten was the more capable; she was not quite so narrow and sour as her unmarried sister, who was always prone to criticise, and had got worse as the years passed.

"We ought to catch him," said Miss Booke, as they went to the side door.

"Let's hope so," replied Mrs. Holten grimly.

Mrs. Bane opened the door and was surprised to see her master's two formidable sisters.

Mrs. Holten smiled.

"Mr. Booke in?"

"He's about somewhere," replied Mrs. Bane.

Miss Booke nodded austerely, as her eyes shot glances at skirting boards, corners, paint, anything that might show up the "lick and promise" housewoman.

Mrs. Bane, feeling the critical glances, showed the visitors into the dining-room and said: "Shall I tell Mr. Booke you're here?"

"Yes, please," said Mrs. Holten; "we want to see him."

Mrs. Bane went out, wondering what was the matter.

Mr. Booke was not long in making his appearance.

He was wearing a black cashmere jacket and a black apron tied at the waist, his gold albert showing above it. He knew there was something serious in the wind from the fact that he had been sent for from the works, a thing his sisters would not have done for nothing. But he refused to show any excitement or perturbation; the Bookes flattered themselves they could meet a crisis with coolness.

As he entered the room he said almost cheerily: "Hello! What's brought you two here?"

"Some family business," said Miss Booke, with a snap.

"Is this true about Tim?" asked Mrs. Holten.

"I can perhaps tell you," he replied slowly, "if you'll tell me what it is?"

"It's up and down Ganton that he's walking out, engaged, if you like, to one of your trimmers," Miss Booke said, as if she were making a charge.

Timothy smacked his lips, looked at both his sisters for a very brief moment, and then said quietly: "Up and down Ganton, is it?" He was keeping himself well in hand, for his sister, Maria, jarred with her very aggressive manner.

Mrs. Holten spoke more tactfully: "They say he's carrying on with Emmie Bollins, one of your trimmers."

There was a pause.

"Oh-h. . . . Well. . . . And what about it?"

His cool attitude annoyed his sisters. Taking it like that! . . .

Miss Booke began: "Well!" But Mrs. Holten, with a little more insight and sense, spoke more quietly. She knew the folly of letting temper run riot. She was prepared to speak after her fashion, but her greatest desire was to achieve.

"You're not backing him up, Timothy, are you? After all, she is only a trimmer, and her father's a shaper or body-maker ——"

"And a poor 'un, whatever he is," whipped out Miss Booke.

"I didn't say I was backing him up," said Timothy, still speaking very quietly and deliberately.

"I wish you'd say what you think of it," said Mrs. Holten. "Did you know about it?"

Timothy hesitated.

"No," snapped Miss Booke.

"Well," said Mrs. Holten, "can't you give Tim a good talking to? If he's walking out with that Emmie

Bollins you know as well as I do what it will lead to."

Timothy reached for his pipe and tobacco jar, which stood on a little table near the fireplace.

"Before we go any further," he said, "suppose I hear what you've got to say," and he filled his pipe.

"Well," said Miss Booke jerkily, "I should think you've heard enough. Tim's walking out with one of your trimmers. Everybody in Ganton's heard about it by now. He was with her in Blackpool, and he's going up and down with her. They were seen together last night in Windmill Lane."

Timothy lit his pipe with a paper spill, which he took from a blue and white jar on the mantelshelf.

His sister Maria had an annoying way.

Mrs. Holten, equally as opposed to the match as her sister, was at the same time more tactful in dealing with her brother.

"It's no good pretending, Timothy," she said, "that you'll like Tim marrying Emmie Bollins, any more than we shall — perhaps less. We're all interested. He's your son, but he's our nephew. It's a family affair, and I'm prepared to do what I can to stop it."

"I should think we all are," said Miss Booke, sharply and thoughtlessly.

Thoughtlessly, because Timothy stedfastly refused to be browbeaten and driven.

"It seems to me," he said quietly, "that Tim'll please himself in a matter o' this kind. And, er . . . I'm not so sure he won't be right."

Miss Booke sat up and looked superbly indignant.

Mrs. Holten understood. She muttered to her sister: "I wish you wouldn't talk so fast, Maria. You surely can see you can't make people do just what you want."

"Make them do it. I don't want to make anybody do

anything. But as Tim's aunt, as *Miss Booke,* at any rate, I've a right to have my say."

"You've had your say," said Timothy sardonically.

Mrs. Holten turned to her brother.

"Now, you don't want Tim to marry this Emmie Bollins, do you, Timothy?"

"I don't know that I've said anything one way or the other," he replied cannily.

"Well, will you?" snapped Miss Booke.

"I will — when it pleases me," and he puffed away at his pipe resolutely and stolidly.

"Now come, Timothy," said Mrs. Holten. "Can't we all see what we can do to help you?"

"I don't know that I want any help."

"That's a Booke all over," said Miss Booke, knowing full well that her brother was now merely responding to an awkward fit, though she refused to see that she herself, by her manner, was the primary cause of it.

Mrs. Holten looked troubled. She wanted to do something and always preferred to do it by mastering, if she could, but she had a good supply of common sense in her composition, and did not play the "bull in the china shop" as her sister Maria was inclined to do. Sophie might have had more weight with Timothy than Maria, she thought. . . .

Her face was drawn and she looked at Timothy who, by now, had got himself behind his pipe, so to speak, with an expression of immovability. Jane knew that attitude. Timothy could be silent for hours — weeks even, if he wished.

Mrs. Holten nodded her head: "Well, Timothy, it will be a great pity if Tim does do anything foolish — a great pity. It isn't as if there was others in the family; he's the only child. . . ."

Timothy continued to smoke and preserve silence.

Miss Booke had now set her face as if she had to endure things — and would.

Just as they were all three beginning to wonder what was going to happen or who was going to make the next move, Tim, himself, came in.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. BOOKE went on smoking while a curious expression crept over his face.

Mrs. Holten darted a look at him, and fancied she caught concern in his eyes. She smiled, a little coldly, at Tim.

Miss Booke, sitting very straight on her chair, looked severe.

"Hello!" began Tim, and saw then that all was not of a roseate hue. He knew the humours of his relations and his first thought was there was a difference of sorts between his father and his aunts.

He took off his black apron, rolled it up and put it in a drawer in the sideboard.

Mrs. Holten saw she must set the ball rolling.

"What's this I hear about you and Emmie Bollins, Tim?" she asked.

Tim looked at her.

"I don't know what you've been hearing, Aunt Jane."

"I think you can guess. It's going about that you're walking out with her."

"Oh. . . ."

"Is it true?"

"I reckon it is."

"Well," said Miss Booke, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Tim Booke, to stand there and coolly tell your family that you're walking out with one of your father's trimmers! Reckon it is, eh. . . . And do you mean to marry her?"

Tim flushed a little.

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"I don't know what there is to be ashamed of," he said.

"That only makes it worse," snapped Miss Booke.

"Oh. . . ."

"You're not thinking of marrying her, are you, Tim?" asked Mrs. Holten.

"By Gum! This is a bit thick, isn't it? I didn't know I had to ask my aunts to choose my wife for me."

"It's not a question of asking your aunts to choose your wife for you," said Miss Booke quickly; "it's a question of you disgracing your family."

"I say, Aunt Maria, that's putting it a bit strong, isn't it? Since you think fit to talk like that, I don't mind telling you that when I marry I shan't think for one minute whether my aunts will approve my wife or not ——"

"Tim," said Mrs. Holten, "there's your father . . . and your family. You ought to consider them, you know."

"Consider 'em. . . . Ay — but how much?"

"Well, you shouldn't marry any one they, er . . . any one that isn't your equal."

"Equal in what way?"

"Position."

"Position." He laughed. "I suppose you mean money. It's no good you talking, Aunt Jane, not a bit. When I marry, I shall marry the woman I choose, and I shan't think of position or anything else."

"Selfishness," jerked out Miss Booke.

Tim smiled.

"Selfishness. . . . I suppose you'd like me to marry somebody that pleased you, somebody with position, whether I wanted to or not; rather than have me marry somebody I wanted if you didn't approve of her. . . .

I think we might leave the question of selfishness out of it."

"Your father, Tim," said Mrs. Holten.

Tim said nothing.

Mr. Booke was still silent and smoking.

"What about him?" asked Mrs. Holten.

"Well," said Tim, "he might have the right to say something, but at present I seem to hear more from my aunts."

"We've got your welfare at heart, Tim," said Mrs. Holten.

"I think we'll drop that," retorted Tim quickly. "What you've really got at heart is your own feelings. You'd like me to marry somebody you can boast about — your nephew's marrying a few thousand pounds, or something of that kind. But I'm going to please myself — let's take that as settled."

"Oh! dear! dear! dear! Can't you see the disgrace for the family?"

"No. If I'm not disgraced, I can't see how the family will be."

"Have you nothing to say to him, Timothy?" Miss Booke said suddenly to her brother.

Mr. Booke quietly took out his pipe.

"You two seem to be managing all right."

"Managing all right," snapped Miss Booke. "We are not managing at all. He's as obstinate as a mule. He can't see anybody's view but his own."

"No," said Mr. Booke quietly. "And you're going the right way to make him obstinate. I don't care who she is, but a chap as wanted to marry a girl would be a fool to give her up because two of his aunts started shouting at him."

"I'm not shouting," said Mrs. Holten.

"And neither am I," shrieked Miss Booke.

"Oh! Well, call it what you like — shouting, nagging, jawing — it's all the same. You know what I mean. Any young chap o' spirit would refuse to be browbeaten off a girl if he only half wanted her. I don't know why you can't think of other folks' feelings now and then ——"

Miss Booke jumped up.

"And what about our feelings?"

"We don't want to browbeat or nag or anything," said Mrs. Holten, "and you know that, Timothy."

"If anybody had been listening to you since you've been here he'd have thought so, at any rate," said Timothy grimly.

Tim, who had been getting very angry towards his aunts for their, as he thought, interference, listened to his father with a great reassurance. It encouraged him to feel angry with his aunts, but made him feel very deeply drawn to his father.

"Oh! dear! dear!" said Mrs. Holten.

"It seems to me we have done no good by coming," said Miss Booke.

"That's as about as wise a thing as you've said since you've been here, Maria," said Timothy.

"Well —" began Miss Booke, but Mrs. Holten, who did not want her brother and sister to start quarrelling, said soothingly, and in almost a pleading voice: "Is it really true, Tim, that you are walking out with Emmie Bollins?"

Tim hesitated.

"When I mean to get married, the first person I shall tell is father."

"Then you haven't made up your mind yet?"

"I didn't say that."

"Have you?" asked Miss Booke.

"I'm not going to tell you," said Tim very quietly, almost hotly.

"There!... There!... From Tim Booke! Well...."

"I suppose," said Mrs. Holten, with a certain amount of resignation in her voice, "it means that you have made up your mind. . . . Dear! dear! . . . Emmie Bollins . . . her father a body-maker, or something of the sort. . . . It'll be all over Ganton. . . . What will they say? Timothy Booke's son marrying one of his father's trimmers."

Timothy got up. He spoke very quietly.

"I think it would be best, Jane," he said, "if you considered this topic at an end. Your talk — neither yours nor Maria's — isn't doing a ha'p'orth o' good. In fact, I should say it's the other way about. When Tim's going to get married you'll hear about it."

"You might as well talk to a stump as talk to some people," said Miss Booke — a common remark of hers when she had failed to convert some one to her views.

Mrs. Holten tried suavity and a little advice. She said she spoke for Tim's good, and said that marrying out of one's position was dangerous.

But Tim regarded the reasons as preposterous and the interference as impertinent, and took refuge in a blank silence.

The two ladies, finding they did no good, that is to say, that they got hold of nothing definite (though each persuaded herself she really had gone the right way to work, even if the other had failed), decided to go. Mrs. Holten hoped for the best, hoped the family wouldn't have cause for regrets over anything Tim did, reminded Tim that he was the only child of his father and that his family — all the members of it — had a right to look to him,

for a line of conduct that would never bring discredit on them.

Miss Booke said curtly she hoped he'd learn sense before he was much older, and that if he did anything stupid in the way of marrying he'd regret it, and she — Miss Booke — would take care to let any woman know it, who tried to drag down a member of the Booke family — she would that!

When Tim and his father were alone neither spoke for a moment. Tim looked as if he would like to say something, but found a difficulty in beginning. He postponed speech — said to himself he would tell his father later, and was going out of the room when Timothy said, "Tim."

"Yes, Father."

There was a pause.

"Is this true?"

"Yes."

Another pause.

"I think you might have told me."

"I meant to, Father," said Tim. "I've. . . . It's. . . . I suppose somebody's seen me with her, and so it's all over Ganton."

There was another pause.

"Have you made up your mind?"— this from the father.

"Yes."

"No going back on it?"

"No."

"H'm. . . There's been no necessity to marry her?"

"No. No fear. If I died to-morrow or left her, she could marry anybody; there's nothing of that sort."

"H'm. I'm glad o' that. You . . . you really want her?"

"Yes."

"Has it been going on long?"

"No. . . . I met her at Belle Vue a while back, and had a dance with her; and, er. . . . She's all right, Father. She's sensible, and I should think a good worker. She'll make me a better wife than many a one as these aunts of mine 'ud have picked out for me."

"Ay. . . . Ay. . . . Only, after all, she is one of our trimmers. Well, it's your affair; you're marrying her, not me. I can't say as I approve; but then, I shan't disapprove. I'm not going out of my way to be over-pleasant to her — you're marrying her, not me. If she does all right, well, we'll see. Only, whoever it is, I shall keep my word, Tim."

"In what way, Father?"

"When you marry, the works will be yours — and this house."

"Oh! But ——"

"That's settled. I didn't think your wife would be one of our trimmers; but that'll make no difference to my word; a promise is a promise. Only . . . well, I hope she'll be a good wife and that you'll be happy — if you do marry her."

"Thanks. . . . Thank you, Father. I, er. . . ." Tim looked as if he would like to say a great deal: as if there were certain emotions he would like to lay bare before his father; but it was very difficult. He could not describe, with any ease, the particular emotions he had towards Emmie or towards his father, even at that moment. He was disturbed by his father's generosity: it seemed extravagant in comparison with his aunts' attitudes. He hesitated. After all, he had said thanks. He managed to mutter: "I think she'll be all right,

Father. . . . I, er. . . . I hope you'll be satisfied. I don't, er——" He was uncomfortable.

"That's all right, lad. I only want you to be happy," said Timothy. And he, too, hesitated, as if he would like to say more; like, perhaps, to say something really feeling about his affection for his son, but he found it too difficult.

They both stood silent for a moment, feeling awkward and very desirous, somehow, of expressing a delicate sensation. But neither could find words. They felt things they could not discuss. . . .

Mr. Booke suddenly said: "That's all. I reckon you want to get out. Did you lock up?"

"Yes, Father."

And then Tim went out.

CHAPTER IX

THOUGH Mr. Booke could not regard his son's actions with a kindly eye, he did not necessarily bring Emmie Bollins within the pale of his indulgence.

Mr. Booke had really some of the feelings of his sisters. He had wanted his son to do well, and one of the ways of "doing well" was to marry well; hence, this engagement to Emmie Bollins was of a nature to disappoint him. He could forgive his son and wish him well, but he had still a kind of secret desire to see Emmie castigated in some way for having come across Tim's path. He would do nothing to thwart his son's happiness, but neither would he stretch out a hand to help Emmie.

She trimmed as usual, and when Timothy met her he nodded curtly or passed her by.

She took it very calmly. She was engaged; she knew Tim was in love with her and meant to marry her; she could face the others. Not that she had much chance before marriage, for Miss Booke and Mrs. Holten particularly wanted to impress on her (by a cold-shouldering behaviour) the ostracism she had earned for herself by worming her way into the Booke family, and consequently she received no invitations to the homes of these ladies.

They had gnashed their teeth and raged together, but to the outside world they put on quite a pleasant face. Tim's engagement. . . . Oh! well, they understood Miss Bollins was a good worker, would make him probably a good wife, and it was, perhaps, as well he had not lost his heart to a doll. Besides, she was really very attrac-

tive — everybody had to admit that. And money wasn't everything! . . .

Privately, the Booke ladies (Mrs. Grass the least) let their tongues wag in full. Emmie's ears must have needed horrible scratching at times, if it be really true that our ears do itch when we are being attacked over tea cups — or anywhere, for that matter.

Mrs. Holten and Miss Booke gave Tim the cold shoulder to some extent. If they met, they never asked about Emmie, or if they mentioned her or the prospective marriage, they did so with a gibe or a sneer. "I suppose Mrs. Bollins will have her house full of guests at the wedding, Tim. . . ." Or, "I should like to see Emmie Bollins' bottom drawer. . . . I don't suppose Sam Bollins has a decent suit to wear. . . ." "Emmie Bollins' friends will make a good show at the wedding," et cetera.

Tim had not got his father's temper, which could blaze on occasions; he was mild, and kept things well focused, as a rule. When his aunts tried sarcasm, he either ignored it or retorted in kind, but never spoke in the fury of passion.

He did not wear down these aunts of his, because a certain fierce obstinate pride seemed almost vital to their natures; but, at least, he let them clearly understand that nothing they said or did would turn him from his intention of marrying Emmie Bollins.

The inevitability galled them. When they met they discussed Tim and Emmie. They said sharp things to Timothy, but though he tolerated some, he let them know there were limits they must not pass. He did not approve of Emmie; he would rather Tim had chosen elsewhere; but Timothy loved his son and did not intend that a daughter-in-law should snap that link of affection.

Of course, people in Ganton talked, and the Bookes

had to put up with the acid-like remarks, the neatly turned commiseration, the surprised "A trimmer, isn't she?" . . . But these remarks only really came from a few, although to the female Bookes it sounded as if the whole world whispered them. Ganton, in general, did not bother its head about the business at all. Ganton, that knew by sight or hearing, Tim and Emmie, smiled, perhaps, and added: "She's doing well; he might have done worse." When hat manufacturers' wives cleaned and cooked and managed houses without maids, it seemed gratuitous to attempt to sneer at a "trimmer." But then the Bookes were inclined to arrogance and when thwarted, very bitter with the tongue.

Emmie and Tim took matters calmly. Letters never passed between them; there was no need. Emmie went to work as was her wont in the trimming-room of T. Booke & Son, and walked out on certain evenings with the soon-to-be sole possessor of that hat factory. They walked down semi-quiet lanes, where he put his arm round her waist and kissed her and assumed an attitude of grave circumspection when other people appeared on the scene.

There were no formal introductions. Tim merely meant to marry Emmie, and with a practical directness said to himself that fact did not mean that he had to go hob-nobbing with Sam Bollins, her father, or with her mother or her sister.

But Emmie, after a few months of engagement, felt that he really ought to call. After all, he passed, and on one occasion, seeing Mrs. Bollins at the door, he had stopped and said: "Emmie in?"

"She's just gone to the grocer's," said Mrs. Bollins, who wanted to be very pleasant and amiable, and yet not obsequious, to her prospective son-in-law.

"Oh! . . . Gone cold, hasn't it? Are you keeping well?"

"Yes, Mr. Tim, thank you. Will you come in a minute? We're upset a bit, but, er——"

"No. No—no, thanks. Some other day. Tell Emmie I'll be ready in three quarters of an hour, will you?"

"Yes."

"G'night."

"Good night, Mr. Tim."

And Mrs. Bollins was quite excited over this little conversation with the man who was about to marry her daughter. For one thing, it showed his straight, plain-forward dealing; he was walking out with Emmie, and made no pretence to hide things or cover them up. A nice young fellow, too. . . . He said he'd come in some other day. Of course, he was probably in a hurry now. . . .

Mrs. Bollins felt unduly elated; she seemed drawn in the circle of the Booke family herself. The engagement no longer concerned Emmie alone. She walked across the road to Mrs. Cross.

"Just had Emmie's young man calling on me."

"Oh! Mr. Booke? . . ."

"Yes. Very nice he is, too. They're going out together, and he just come and had a little chat with me."

"Your Emmie's doing well there."

"Yes. I tell her that. . . . She'll manage all right."

When Emmie came home, Mrs. Bollins said: "Er. . . ." (She was boggling at the style of address.) "Mr. Tim's been."

"Oh!" Emmie was pleased and surprised. "What did he want?"

"He just had a few words with me; he was passing,

that was all. He said he'd be ready in three quarters of an hour."

"Oh! . . . Did he ask you to tell me?"

"Yes."

Emmie was still further pleased. The fact that Tim had practically told her mother he was preparing to meet her and was obviously thinking about her — although a commonplace to her (Emmie) — was very gratifying. It emphasised her engagement. Mr. Timothy Booke, Junior, calling at her house to leave a message that he was anticipating a meeting ministered to her pride in her position.

"I suppose he didn't say much," she said, really desiring to learn, if possible, every word he had uttered.

"No — we just talked." Mrs. Bollins wished to magnify her own part in the short colloquy. She did not wish her daughter to think that Mr. Tim only regarded her (Emmie) with respect; she too could talk to Mr. Tim easily enough. . . .

The engagement kept on its even course until the next summer, when Tim said to his father:

"Oh! . . . Emmie and I are thinking of getting married, Father, this Wakes."

"Oh-h. . . ."

There was silence for a moment.

"I reckon you've both made up your minds," said Mr. Booke, after a pause.

"Yes. We're not to a week or two, for that matter, if there's any reason why the Wakes wouldn't suit."

Mr. Booke nodded his head.

"I wasn't thinking of that," he said. He smacked his lips.

"What, er . . ." began Tim.

"I was thinking of her. . . . Well, you've seen enough of one another by now to know your own minds. Are you satisfied?"

"I am. Quite. There's nobody else I know as I'd put in the same street with Emmie," said Tim, with some little feeling, as if he owed Emmie and his own feelings so much and would pay the debt.

"H'm. . . . I hope she'll make you a good wife, my lad. I've nothing against her. I'm not going to make a fuss of her till I see how she behaves — and perhaps not then. But I'll give her a chance. . . . Your aunts don't like her."

"They're not marrying her."

"No. But they're part of the family, and you'll meet now and again. However, if you've made up your mind, we'll call it settled. This'll be your home."

"Oh! But ——"

Mr. Booke waved his hand.

"No. I keep my word. I'm going to retire. I hope Emmie'll stand by you and do her best to help you and remember the firm. This house will be yours and the business. I shall come when I like, poke my nose in what I want, and say what I like — but it'll be all yours — I'll see Stevens and fix it up. . . . This Wakes, eh?

"Well. . . . H'm. I don't suppose Sam Bollins has anything to spend on a wedding ——"

"I'll see to that," interrupted Tim.

"See to what?"

"I'll let 'im have something. Besides, we shall have a quiet wedding; we want no fuss."

Timothy shook his head.

"Nay, nay, lad. No hole-in-the-corner business; there's nothing to be ashamed of. And you're the only one, you know."

"But we'd rather, Father; we want no fuss."

"You needn't have any fuss. I reckon invitations can be sent out in my name as well as the Bollins'— and I'll pay. You can get married at Christ Church, and I'll take the guests to Marple or somewhere, and give 'em a feed and a drive. We'll fix up summat. I, er. . . . Emmie is a good-looking wench."

"Yes."

There was a pause.

"You've perhaps made a good choice, Tim. . . . I don't know. At any rate, we shall see."

"She's all right, Father. She suits me, and what does it matter about money? I've enough."

"The money's all right."

When the details of the wedding came to be discussed, the Booke ladies found they had a great deal to say. A great deal of what they said was irrelevant; it did not help on the arguments at all. "Imagine Emmie Bollins having a wedding like this! Never dreamt of this in all her days! . . . Two big fat folk would just about fill that kitchen of hers — have they a scullery? . . ." "Salmon mayonnaise. . . . I don't suppose the Bollins lot have ever heard of it; they'll probably want to eat it with a spoon! . . . ."

Such remarks as those did not settle anything really, but they gave Miss Booke and Mrs. Holten a certain relief and Mrs. Grass some amusement, which was promptly criticised by Miss Booke, declared the occasion to be "no laughing matter." She could scarcely understand how a Booke could look pleasant at such a time.

And yet this wedding had to be a creditable affair. The Bookes were mixed up in it and their pride insisted on the thing being well done. Timothy sat and smoked

and made suggestions and offered criticisms, but he knew that his sisters, however bitter of tongue, were at least very capable of organisation and that the wedding arrangements, if left to them, would be satisfactory. He said he would foot the bill and he could trust them to make the required show, to see everything was of the best and also to see there was no waste.

And these Booke ladies were very proud of their arrangements. They wanted the guests, after the wedding, to feel they had never been to a better managed affair — even if Emmie Bollins were the bride. And what was more, they would loose their bitter tongues on anybody who criticised Emmie adversely; they reserved that particular function for themselves.

At the beginning of July (the wedding being fixed for the first week in August), Timothy said to his son: "Hadn't you better bring Emmie in to supper one night? Or let her come and have dinner and meet your aunts here next Sunday."

"I'll tell her," said Tim.

"Sunday will be best," said Mr. Booke. "She can have dinner and you can sit in the garden and do what you like till tea time, and your uncles and aunts'll be here after church. It's about time they met. I think we might have 'em all here, for that matter."

"I'll tell her," said Tim.

Emmie was very pleased at the invitation, and the fact that it was for dinner, tea and supper, gave it a family ring in her ears. It was much more friendly than a simple invitation to tea or supper. Evidently Mr. Booke regarded the engaged with a benevolent eye, and was inclined to be sympathetic.

Emmie nodded.

"You'll come?" he asked.

"Yes. . . . You'd like me to."

"Yes. We can go for a walk in the afternoon — or after tea, for that matter, and get back for supper. They'll all be there for supper."

Emmie looked at him.

"All . . . who's all?"

"Uncle Tom and Aunt Jane, Uncle Fred and Aunt Sophia, and Aunt Maria — Mr. and Mrs. Holten and Mr. and Mrs. Grass, and my aunt that lives down Manchester Road."

"Miss Booke?"

"Yes."

Emmie *was* silent. It was a family affair! All that lot. . . . They wanted to have a proper look at her, eh? . . . She thought of her clothes at once. She had the new summer dress; it was good enough. And she'd got a new underskirt — and a new pair of stockings, too. She didn't mind; she was as good-looking as any of that lot. . . . And wouldn't they watch her? She'd have to mind her p's and q's . . . but what did it matter? They could say what they liked; she was marrying Tim, not them ——

"What are you thinking about?" Tim asked her.

"Nothing."

He gave a little laugh, knowing that "something" was nearer the mark.

"Some of those aunts of mine can say things," he said.

"What sort of things?" said Emmie quickly.

"All sorts — if they think they can cut you a bit."

Emmie was silent. She knew the reputation of the Booke family. She shrugged her shoulders. . . . If they started cutting at her. . . . Well, two could play at that game.

"Don't let them say cheeky things to you," said Tim, as if he guessed what she was thinking about. "They try it on me, but I just take no notice or hit back."

"Why should they want to say cheeky things to me?" asked Emmie.

"Ask me another. Why does a duck swim?"

"I'm as good as them," said Emmie, after a pause, the words coming out in spite of herself, in a kind of fierce resentment and bravado.

Tim looked round. They were in a bend of the lane with no one near. He put his arm round her and kissed her.

"You're a jolly sight better, Emmie."

She looked at him, both gratefully and lovingly, as she pushed her hair back under her hat.

Emmie was certainly well dressed when she went to dinner to Mr. Booke's on the Sunday. She had a natural taste for the suitable and effective, and her face and figure could have withstood many a shrieking garment. Her only trouble was creaky boots. But that, she imagined, couldn't be helped; everybody's boots creaked when they were new — so she imagined. She remembered hearing the Rev. John O'Kelly's creaking tremendously in church one morning, and after that, she seemed to fancy noisy boots were in some way sacred, like surplices.

Mr. Booke, by this time softened towards his prospective daughter-in-law, and philosophically (meaning sensibly) facing the inevitable in such a way as to get the best out of the marriage, was prepared to greet her in a very friendly manner.

Mrs. Bane had taken extra care with the plain, but substantial and wholesome dinner, and was really curious

to see this Emmie Bollins that was going to marry Mr. Tim.

But the restrained and almost dignified curiosity at Helston House was nothing to the excitement that prevailed at the Bollins'.

Sarah Bollins had wondered more than a little if Mr. Tim were playing with her sister; she took some time and had some difficulty in believing that Emmie had won Mr. Tim whole-heartedly. She watched the walkings-out with a keen interest, not unalloyed by some fears. She had been surprised at the news when she first heard it, and there were occasions when she was not altogether happy at Emmie's calm assurance of remarkable fortune, but she was now most anxious that the affair should not collapse. She had spoken of her sister's young man, Mr. Tim Booke, son of Mr. Booke of Booke & Son, so frequently, that she was very anxious to be able to speak of her brother-in-law, Mr. Booke of Booke & Son. And if anything happened to prevent that becoming a reality Sarah felt she would lose the something she had recently gathered round her on account of her sister's engagement.

Mr. Bollins had suggested to his wife he should wear two shirts a week now, and every now and then he hinted to his wife that Emmie's marriage would be a good thing for them.

Mrs. Bollins quite agreed about the good thing and said it would be only right and proper. She also commended the idea about the shirts, only as Sam Bollins had only two, the idea had to be waived for practical reasons.

There was, consequently, a kind of keen watchfulness pervading the Bollins family in relation to Emmie. Some things could scarcely be repressed openly — particularly the fears. If Emmie were not out with Tim

on some usually engaged evening there were very anxious looks, and one or the other of the family (frequently more than one) said to Emmie: "Not going out with him to-night."

Emmie's reply:

"No, he's got something on — a billiard match at the club," reassured them. They understood billiard matches and clubs.

But a thin atmosphere of uneasiness seemed to hang over the household till Emmie had been out again with Mr. Tim to reassure them all.

No wonder this invitation to dinner gave them immense satisfaction.

"Going to dinner," said Mrs. Bollins, looking at her daughter in a sort of wonderment.

Sarah said: "About time, too." This great fuss of Emmie at home was not always to her liking.

Mr. Bollins nodded; he was naturally elated.

"Now, take care and behave yourself well. Don't put your knife in your mouth — remember that."

Emmie smiled. She was wondering herself if there would be any little pitfalls at the table.

"I expect they'll use serviettes," said Mrs. Bollins. "And being Sunday, they'll all be clean. . . . Perhaps they'll be nicely done up. . . . I wonder if Mrs. Bane goes in for that sort of thing?"

"Now, mind what I say," said Mr. Bollins. "Don't put your knife in your mouth."

Emmie said: "Do you think I don't know how to behave myself?"

Mr. Bollins shook his head.

"You should do, my girl; you should do. But take notice: don't put your knife in your mouth."

"They'll have their vegetables in dishes," said Mrs.

Bollins, trying to picture the table. "And some folk, I believe, pass the vegetables to you and ask you to help yourself."

"I don't like that," said Sarah quickly. "I'm always afraid to take enough that way."

"You'll be all right with that," said Mr. Bollins. "You needn't worry about that. If I had a chance, I could show you. I don't care whether they pass you dishes or help you. . . . But, remember what I've told you: don't put your knife in your mouth."

Sarah laughed.

"You would look funny, Emmie, if you cut yourself, wouldn't you?"

"One would think I had just come out of the backwoods, from the way you talk," said Emmie, and she went upstairs to look at some of the things she was going to wear. At any rate, she meant to go decently dressed.

On the Saturday evening she had a bath. She felt that nothing should be left to chance. Suppose she met with an accident; broke her leg, for instance, and had to be put to bed at Helston House. . . .

So the rest of the family went to bed and left her up to wash in a zinc hip bath, placed in front of the kitchen fire.

CHAPTER X

EMMIE had to go through a mental ordeal before she could make up her mind which door she ought to knock at. She was so anxious not to do the wrong thing that she began to feel there was a right and wrong door. If she went to the front, she might be accused of "putting it on"—she, who went regularly to work in the trimming-room at the rear!—and if she went to the back door they might think she was trying to be too familiar and that it wasn't the proper thing for a visitor to do. And then her common sense came to the rescue—"As if a thing like a door mattered." To be followed almost at once with the hint: but Miss Booke, eh. . . . And Mrs. Holten. . . .

Emmie went to the side door in Davy Street as a compromise.

Tim opened the door.

"Found your way, then?" he said, smiling.

"Of course, I had to ask," she replied, with quick humour.

He looked round. There was nobody about. He kissed her.

"They'll hear," she whispered—hoping they would.

"That will make a difference," he said, looking happy. "I don't know what you'll do with your hat and things——"

Just then Mrs. Bane appeared, and Emmie at once began to wonder if she should shake hands with her or not. Left to herself she would not only have shaken hands but have kissed the smiling housekeeper, only—

well, she had to keep that knife out of her mouth, and she meant so to behave that no nasty remarks should be said about her.

Mrs. Bane nodded very pleasantly: "Miss Bollins — good morning."

Emmie said "Good morning," and looked a little timid, but had also a friendly air. "Another nice morning, isn't it?"

"Yes. But at this time of the year we ought to be having nice weather. Will you come upstairs? You can take your hat off in the spare room."

Emmie followed Mrs. Bane upstairs, and was at once struck with the difference between her house and this. As she put her foot on the stairs carpet she thought at once of that worn-out oilcloth that made a pretence of covering their stairs. . . . And these brass rods. . . . And the space there was on the landing. . . . And the rooms — what a lot! . . .

"I suppose," said Mrs. Bane, when she was in the bedroom with Emmie, "you'll be getting married soon."

"Soon — we're thinking about the Wakes."

"And very nice, too. . . . Well, I wish you luck. Mr. Tim's a gentleman. Where are you going to live?"

"Er. . . . Oh! We haven't settled everything yet," said Emmie, with swift tactfulness.

"No. There's such a lot to be thought of at a time like this. Well, I must get back to the dinner; mustn't let that spoil. If you want anything, just ask. You can put your hat on the bed, and you'll find your way downstairs all right."

"Yes, yes," said Emmie. "Don't you wait. Thank you very much."

When Mrs. Bane had left her, Emmie at once began to take stock of things in the room. The bed, with the

beautiful spread on it, made her screw up her hands in an emotion of delighted wonder. There was a carpet all over the floor, a hearth rug and a brass fender and fire-irons, with a little Japanese screen in front of the fireplace. Between the two windows there was a dressing-table, with a fine swinging mirror in the middle and two oblong mirrors at the sides. Emmie had no idea of the particular kind of furniture; she could not tell the difference between Chippendale and Sheraton, and rosewood and mahogany were almost the same to her. But she felt expense in the room: luxuries, things that only people with money can afford. . . . She noted the large wardrobe with the panel mirrors, and looked at herself in both of them and felt that those mirrors had not reflected many better looking than herself, though she thought it — who shouldn't. She had no time to view the pictures, for she was afraid they would be wondering downstairs what she was doing — perhaps think she was taking things! . . .

Tim was waiting in the hall.

"You might as well come in the dining-room," he said. "Dinner will be ready soon."

Mr. Booke was sitting in a big easy chair, reading the local weekly newspaper, when Emmie entered. He lowered his paper and nodded.

"We. . . . Found your way in all right?"

Emmie was not sure whether he would want to shake hands or not. He sat up and looked agreeable, but made no attempt at any ceremonial greeting. Emmie was glad, for it made her path a little easier. It was the uncommon things that tried her.

"Yes," she said.

"Well, sit you down and make yourself at home. You might as well start."

Emmie sat down and felt a little awkward. She was not much troubled, for the genuinely pretty woman has a confidence in herself; but Emmie did not want to make any false steps. She looked at Tim. There was a silence.

Mr. Booke said sharply, but not harshly: "How old are you, Emmie?"

"Twenty-two."

"H'm. You look older than that. I suppose you're old enough to get married."

"I hope so."

"Ay. And you want to get married next Wakes, eh!"

Emmie looked at Tim.

"We've been thinking of it," she said, and her mind was galloping away with a recital of this conversation to her parents. There was no getting away from this: Mr. Booke talking to her seriously of the marriage.

Then Mrs. Bane came in, followed by the little maid, and dinner was served.

Mr. Booke carved, and vegetable dishes were put in front of Tim.

They had sirloin of beef and Yorkshire pudding, with potatoes and cauliflowers.

Mr. Booke asked Emmie if she liked undercut, and she hadn't the slightest idea what he meant, but guessing he was referring to fat said, "A little."

Tim helped her to vegetables, and then Mr. Booke said: "Get ahead, Emmie — don't wait."

Emmie, fortunately, was not flustered with a lot of knives and forks, but she rarely sat down to table where the cloth was so white and the cutlery so clean, and the cruet was in perfect order, with the mustard in a regular pot, instead of being in an eggcup or some other odd

vessel. And the plates seemed so fine and substantial and pretty — you could hang them on the wall, was Emmie's reflection, meant to be conveyed to her parents when she reached home.

To outward seeming Emmie had taken Mr. Booke's advice and was at home. She did not put her knife in her mouth, but used both it and the fork neatly, and passed Tim's plate and then Mr. Booke's when he wanted vegetables.

And, of course, there were table napkins, the use of which made Emmie feel as if she were a most superior being — it had far more effect on her than the cutlery or the cruet or the cloth or the food.

Emmie, having a choice between apple tart and trifle, elected apple tart, and was pleased to see that both Tim and Mr. Booke took that also. She refused cheese, but was interested in the biscuit barrel and the little biscuits.

They had coffee after dinner and Emmie thought it was most luxurious — the three cups on the (what she thought) silver tray, striking her imagination keenly.

When the dinner was over Emmie felt thoroughly at home. She had gone through the meal without making any foolish blunders, so far as she knew, and she had acquired an ease of manner that would stand her in good stead when she had to meet the other members of the family in the evening. By this time she had found she could talk freely and frankly to Mr. Booke, despite the fact that she was one of his employés — in essence that fact never intruded itself: it was ignored by them all and felt by none. Emmie was one of the family, or better still, about to be, which meant that for the moment she was treated with attention and consideration.

At that time the Home Rule controversy raged, for Lord Salisbury's government had been defeated and Mr.

Gladstone had openly proclaimed himself a Home Ruler. The elections which began on the 1st of July had resulted in a crushing defeat of the Liberals.

Mr. Booke talked to Emmie of Home Rule, and somehow did it so well that she did not know whether he was a Home Ruler or not, but thought he was.

Mr. Booke made conversation easy by doing a good deal of it himself. Emmie did not read newspapers — except the local weekly — but admitted she had heard of Mr. Stead, the "unemployed," and Sir Charles Dilke, all news items of prominence in the year 1886.

But Emmie had a bright outlook on life, her mind was clear and she was capable of grasping a subject quickly, so Mr. Booke thought more of his prospective daughter-in-law after an hour's intimacy than he had done before.

Tim and Emmie sat in the garden till tea time, and after tea went a walk, returning to Helston House in time for supper.

There were present, Mr. and Mrs. Holten, Mr. and Mrs. Grass, and Miss Booke, besides Timothy Booke and the lovers.

Emmie, who had been quite comfortable at tea, was moved by mixed emotions as the hour approached when she must meet Tim's uncles and aunts. She was very desirous of making a good impression on Tim's relatives, particularly after the happy time she had spent at Helston House. If she could get on so well with Mr. Booke, why not with the others? But three of "the others" were women — with tongues.

Emmie thought of her looks, her figure, her dress, and thought they (meaning these "aunts") wouldn't have much to say. And yet, if they liked. . . . She had vague fears. . . . In the end she was confident and diffi-

dent, wishful to be in the formidable company, and anxious about criticism.

She took her hat off upstairs again and saw other hats and dolmans on the bed. She had a look at them. . . . Nothing particularly brilliant, she thought, and was somewhat reassured at the sight of them.

She looked at herself in the glass, tidied her hair and washed her hands in the bathroom, thinking, at the same time, what a luxurious place a bathroom was — how different from their scullery. But those taps wanted a bit of cleaning, all the same. . . .

Tim was waiting to take her in the drawing-room.

"Reckon I'd better introduce you," he said.

Emmie said nothing.

As she entered the drawing-room, she heard Mr. Grass laugh rather loudly, and caught a confused conversation from the three ladies, who were together.

Mr. Grass was nearest the door, and said rather jovially:

"So this is Emmie, is it?" and held out his hand. "How are you? very well?"

Emmie took it very smilingly. "Yes, thank you," she replied.

Mr. Holten stood quite gravely. "How d'you do?" and shook hands.

The three ladies did not move. Mrs. Holten, who wore spectacles, pushed them a little farther from her nose. Miss Booke sat as upright as a church steeple and Mrs. Grass looked keenly curious.

Tim brought Emmie round.

"I don't know if you want introducing," he said quietly, with a certain calm indifference. "Here's Emmie — my Aunt Jane, Mrs. Holten ——"

"There's no need to introduce her, Tim," said Mrs.

Holten. "We all know Emmie Bollins by this time. We've seen you on your way to the trimming-room often enough, I should think." She smiled faintly at Emmie — a little more faintly and it would not have been recognised as a smile.

"I should think so, indeed," said Miss Booke. "Many's the time I've heard her clogs rattle." She smiled vinegarly.

"Oh! You cats!" thought Emmie. The mention of clogs galled her. She had certainly worn them when she was younger, but had given them up some time ago, except for an occasional very wet day.

She stood still. Her smile, that had at first been pleasant and joyous, faded into a half-sickly, half-defiant expression.

"Well," said Mr. Grass, "better dry feet in clogs than wet 'uns in cheap boots, eh, er — Emmie?" He had boggled at the Christian name for a moment, and so it came as after-consideration.

"A decent pair of boots will keep rain out," said Miss Booke sharply. "My feet never get wet. Still, of course, we don't expect — er — Tim's wife to wear clogs."

"Have you been a walk, Emmie?" asked Mrs. Grass, who wanted to talk to Emmie and get on terms with her.

Miss Booke glared. Mrs. Holten screwed up her mouth. Why was their sister making so free so soon with this Emmie Bollins? She ought to be kept in her place, or at any rate, made to feel it. They would have to be friendly ultimately, but the trimmer ought to have her trimmings thrown at her first.

"Yes," replied Emmie quietly.

"Nice to have a pleasant Sunday," said Mrs. Holten. "You feel fitter for work on the Monday morning.

What time do you have to get to the trimming-room, Emmie?"

"Eight o'clock," replied Emmie.

"Do you pad for your mother, too?" asked Miss Booke.

"She does very little now," replied Emmie.

"She'll miss you," said Mrs. Holten. "If your money doesn't go in the house, they'll feel it."

"They'll manage," said Emmie, who was feeling herself now being very well baited.

"They'll manage — of course, they'll manage," said Mrs. Holten. "As long as your father's steady and there's work at Booke & Son's. I suppose he'll always be able to get enough to do if he wants it."

"And you've a sister that trims, haven't you?" asked Miss Booke.

"Yes."

"Then they'll not be so badly off."

Emmie began to think it might be worth while telling these ladies they needn't imagine they were scoring over her, because they weren't. . . .

Tim was quiet. Mr. Booke was listening. The other two men were talking politics: "Lord Salisbury would have no easy job for these Liberal Unionists headed by Lord Harlington and Chamberlain — Chamberlain, principally — were a dangerous flank. They were against Home Rule, but they were also against Lord Salisbury's Toryism. . . . There'd be a crash soon. . . ."

Mrs. Grass had at last succeeded in getting hold of Emmie to be able to say:

"You're going to be married at the Wakes, aren't you?"

"We're thinking of it."

"And where are you going to live?"

Emmie looked at Tim.

"Here," said Tim.

"Here," echoed Mrs. Holten, as if aghast at the idea, with which, however, she was very well acquainted.

"Yes," repeated Tim.

Emmie wished that she were at home, or rather, that these Booke ladies were.

"But what's your father going to do? He doesn't want a young family round him," said Miss Booke.

"Father's going somewhere else."

"Well!" said Mrs. Holten. "That's a nice start! Turning your father out of his house when you get married."

Emmie's eyelids were twitching with emotion. She wanted to turn nobody out of a house. She had even suggested that Mr. Booke should go on living in the house, she didn't mind. And here they were, talking like this. She had always felt folks would talk. . . .

"Did *you* know that?" Mrs. Holten suddenly asked Emmie.

"Ye-es."

Mrs. Holten snorted, and looked significantly at her sisters, taking off her spectacles, as she did so, with a fine emphasis. There was an air in the action of coming to grips with something or other.

Emmie wondered what on earth they were going to say or do next. Why didn't somebody talk about something else? . . .

Miss Booke said: "Well. . . . So you're being turned out of your house, Timothy, when you get your daughter-in-law?"

"I'm not turned out at all," Timothy replied stolidly, and Emmie felt as if she could kiss him for that.

"But you're going out."

"Ay."

"What difference is there, then?" asked Mrs. Holten sharply. "You're only going out because one of your trimmers come in — I call that being turned out."

Emmie went almost white.

Tim smiled, with a trace of wickedness in it — as if he said: "These aunts of mine are playing the fool again."

"You meant leaving here, Timothy, in any case, when Tim married, didn't you?" asked Mrs. Grass.

"Ay."

Miss Booke sniffed.

"It is funny, all the same. Emmie, here, comes out of the trimming-room into this house, and then the proprietor of T. Booke & Son's goes out."

Emmie said: "I didn't ask Mr. Booke to go. I didn't want him to go, for that matter."

"Nobody said you did," retorted Miss Booke. "But the fact's there, isn't it?"

Emmie was silent, and felt she had not improved matters. She wanted to say cutting things to these ladies, but they were sisters of Mr. Booke and she was in his house, for the first time, in fact, and the fact that, after all, she was marrying above her station and people like that had to put up with tongues, restrained her.

Mrs. Bane saved the situation at that moment for Emmie, by announcing that supper was ready.

Mr. Booke got up.

"Then we'll have some," he said, as if he, too, were pleased at the diversion.

Mr. Grass said very jovially to Emmie, as they were going to the dining-room: "Made up your mind where you're going for your honeymoon?"

Emmie was inclined to be depressed by the gibes of the

ladies, but Mr. Grass was clearly trying to be agreeable.

"We had thought of Bournemouth — er ——"

"Bournemouth. . . . Get him to take you to Paris."

Emmie looked mischievously out of her bright eyes.

Mr. Grass laughed.

"You'd enjoy it. And you mayn't get the chance again for some time. You won't be running about when you get a family."

Emmie blushed, but was quite pleased with Mr. Grass's evident show of friendliness.

In the dining-room the Booke ladies surveyed the supper table with critical eyes.

Emmie was impressed by the shining silver, the clean cloth, the beautiful crockery, as well as by the food.

"H'm," said Mrs. Holten. "Mrs. Bane isn't bad at setting out a table."

"No," said Miss Booke. "Overloads it a bit. Some of these sweets would be far better on the sideboard till we want them."

"Let's you see what's coming," said Mr. Holten.

"It wouldn't be a bad thing for Emmie to have a few lessons from Mrs. Bane," said Miss Booke. "It isn't everybody can lay a table."

"No. I don't suppose you often get your serviettes mixed up at home, do you, Emmie?" said Mrs. Holten.

"Not often," replied Emmie, who was surprised herself at her reply. It was not rude, and yet it had in it the effectiveness of retort.

Tim laughed. Timothy almost smiled, and felt he wouldn't mind patting Emmie on the back for that.

"Sit here, Emmie," Tim said, his eyes still twinkling at Emmie's delightful answer.

And Mr. Grass broke into new ground by saying:

"That looks a fine piece of meat, Timothy. D'you still go to Barley's for it? Look at that undercut."

"Ay," said Mr. Booke.

And they all fell to discussing butchers and meat and grocers, and then easily led into bits of gossip.

Emmie was ignored, and was relatively happy.

Tim attended to her very well, and she was now exceedingly anxious not to make any mistake at the table for, if she did, she knew what she had to expect from the ladies watching her.

Miss Booke made her shiver and grow warm by saying:

"Put your bread on the other side of your plate, Emmie; the left side, always, for bread."

Emmie picked up the bread and put it on the left side of her plate as if she were a child being taught a lesson.

Miss Booke did not smile; she spoke as if the sight of bread on the right side of the eater's plate pained her.

Mr. Grass was just about to say he never knew which side he had his bread, and was content to get it in his mouth, when he realised he would make a faux pas and at once felt sorry for Emmie. He was a tanned, healthy-looking man, fond of his wife, and good-natured.

"This beef is good, Timothy," he said. "You can always tell English beef from foreign, can't you?"

The talk was switched off Emmie and etiquette for the moment, particularly as Mrs. Holten had something of importance to say to Mrs. Grass, who nodded.

Miss Booke said, "Is it . . ." She nodded.

Mrs. Holten nodded to signify "Yes."

Then there was a trio of "Isn't it? . . . Well. . . . I always said so," winding up with, "We'll talk about it after," which made Emmie feel like saying: "I don't want to hear your blessed conversation."

When the sweets were served out Mrs. Holten helped to apple tart, Mr. Booke had a jelly to distribute, and Mrs. Grass rice pudding.

Emmie had cast her eyes at the sweets for the purpose of having that which would cause her the least disquietude in handling.

Miss Booke said: "I'll wait; serve the others." Mrs. Holten said she would help herself. Mrs. Grass said, "Some jelly, please, Timothy."

Mrs. Holten said coldly to Emmie, as if she were distributing something extraordinarily rich, and rare: "Some tart . . . apple tart . . . Emmie?"

Now, Emmie had desired jelly, but feared its unstable qualities; she wished for no more lectures from Miss Booke and, being in a diffident or anxious frame of mind, was intimidated even by apple tart, a dish she had eaten at dinner with complete satisfaction. She meant, for a moment, to refuse all sweets, but felt that might be as bad as doing the wrong thing; besides, she was young and food attracted her and she liked sweets.

She did not dare to say: "May I have some pudding?" She had been taught to wait till she was asked. At least, she had had the phrase on critical occasions flung at her when she was young, which is described with benevolent generosity as "teaching."

Mr. Booke said: "Or some jelly, Emmie — or rice pudding?"

"Yes, please," said Emmie, relieved. "Rice pudding, please."

"Yes," said Mrs. Grass, rather fussily helping it; making a deal of fuss over it.

Mrs. Holten looked round the table: "Tim," she said invitingly.

Tim nodded: "Please, Aunt Jane."

Mrs. Grass passed Emmie's plate with an air of doing her well; she would like the girl to see that even milk pudding could be helped liberally. But Mr. Booke said: "Have a bit of pie with it, Emmie?"

Emmie hesitated. She did like apple pie, and Tim was having some.

"Doesn't seem to know her own mind," said Mrs. Holten tartly.

"No, thank you," said Emmie.

"There's plenty," said Mrs. Holten.

"I don't wa—" began Emmie.

"Give her a bit, Jane," said Timothy. "I can see she likes it."

"She can surely ask for what she wants," said Miss Booke.

"Do you want any tart, Emmie?" asked Mrs. Holten. "It'll go very well with that pudding if you haven't got too much — you see, Mrs. Grass didn't think you were going to have tart as well."

Emmie wanted to throw tart and pudding at them. She was very near to tears, but knew that would be the worst thing she could do. She was blushing beautifully.

"No, thank you," she said, scarcely knowing what she wanted, and only desirous of being left alone.

Tim took her plate and passed it to her.

"Have just what you want," he said. "If you don't like that leave it and have something else. If you want anything else, have it."

Emmie tried to smile.

Miss Booke said: "I like apple tart and rice pudding together myself."

"So do I," said Mrs. Holten.

"I like Mrs. Bane's jellies," said Mrs. Grass.

"Heard about Tom Whittaker, Timothy?" said Mr.

Holten, and again Emmie felt relief that she was not being talked at or told what to do or what not to do.

When she was asked to have some more she said, "No, thank you," and Mrs. Holten said: "I should think Emmie knows what she wants."

"Yes," said Miss Booke, with a most significant nod.

The ladies did not get friendly during the whole of the evening. They talked to one another and ignored Emmie and talked at her. If she were inclined to be happy talking to Tim one of the three ladies would drag her back into the arena, so that she could be made properly and thoroughly to realise that she was entering the Booke family through no wish of theirs, and that she must behave herself in the way approved of or they would quickly and persistently call her over the coals.

In the bedroom, when they were all putting their hats on, Emmie felt almost as if she were a worm. The Booke ladies talked to each other, ignored Emmie, and then Mrs. Holten said: "Let's look at you, Emmie. . . . Turn round. . . . Do you like that hat, Maria?"

Miss Booke said "No," with a snap. "I hope you'll dress quietly and with good taste when you are married to Tim."

"Nobody has found fault with my dress before," said Emmie, hit on the raw. She felt they would be calling her ugly next! . . .

"No; but you'll move in a different class as Mrs. Timothy Booke."

Emmie pressed her lips together; she thought it best to say nothing — just then.

When she walked home with Tim, she said: "What d'you think of your aunts?"

"What about 'em?"

"Getting at me like they did — saying all those spiteful things — as if I was dirt." She was on the edge of tears as she recalled them where she was free to cry without loss of dignity.

Tim laughed.

"That's their way," he said. "You can say what you like to them. They're all mustard when it's talk. Hit 'em back or take no notice — please yourself. They try to get at me sometimes, but they might just as well try to fill a dye kettle with a thimble. Aunt Jane and Aunt Maria think there's nobody equal to the Bookes, but that's only because they're Bookes. If they were anybody else it would be just the same. Only, if you let 'em, they'll walk on you."

Emmie nodded as if with a quiet but sure understanding.

"They won't walk on me," she said.

Tim looked round. It was dark; there were few people about.

"Don't you let 'em," he said, and then he put his arms round her, pressed her to him and kissed her. "Enjoyed yourself?" he asked.

"Yes." She looked into his face lovingly; she felt very grateful for Tim's love.

CHAPTER XI

THE wedding day arrived at last.

Emmie's emotions were ordinary. The fact that she was about to be married was in itself a bigger event to her than whom she was to marry. The Bookes, who had counted for so much hitherto, dropped behind the event in importance.

To be married. . . . There were the new clothes, the ceremony in the church with people about — and not insignificant people, either! the railway journey with those fine clothes packed in a new trunk, Tim by her side. . . . Mrs. Booke. . . . Mrs. Tim Booke. . . . Mrs. Tim, they would call her. . . . The hotel . . . porters about. . . . "Yes, madame," "No, madame." . . . She and Tim alone.

She no sooner felt one wave of emotion break over her than another swept along. It was a day of big emotions for Emmie, and details seemed merged in the one big event.

Tim had given Emmie £20 so that her family could provide themselves with new clothes. Emmie had refused to take the money at first, but Tim had insisted. He said it was for her family — her father and mother and sister . . . he wanted them all to feel comfortable. So Emmie's wedding was a very great day at the Bollins'. For Mr. and Mrs. Bollins and Sarah the principal item was not that Emmie was getting married, but that she was marrying Mr. Timothy Booke of T. Booke & Son. It was "My daughter's marrying Mr. Tim Booke"— or "sister," as the case was.

All the Bollinses were excited. Emmie had, of course, to be turned out irreproachably; but then she was accustomed to dressing well. With Mr. and Mrs. Bollins it was different. Neither of them had been so well dressed for years — probably in all their lives. The new clothes were an anxiety and struggle for them both. Mr. Bollins tried his on the night before — as did they all save Emmie.

Emmie had a bath on the eve of the great day, and when she had finished Sarah got out of bed, came downstairs and had one too — in front of the kitchen fire. Mr. Bollins kept walking up and down the bedroom, worn by anxiety about his boots; he was afraid if there was much walking to do he'd be knocked up. Mrs. Bollins suggested he should change them for a larger pair early in the morning and be comfortable — there was nothing so uncomfortable as tight boots, particularly if you walked a lot. And they would walk, you might rely on that; and Mrs. Holten could pass remarks if they behaved funny. . . . She'd change them if she had tight boots; that was one thing she'd always been careful about — not having tight boots. . . .

She said all this as she sat on the bed, sewing buttons on a chemise and then darning stockings.

Mr. Bollins was not only gravely anxious over his boots, but was also deeply concerned with his clothes. Tails were cut different from what they used to be, he thought he liked the old style best. The trousers were all right. He could have had another pattern. One with a big stripe would have showed up well. But he liked these; they were gentlemanly. . . .

Eventually Emmie was washed. Sarah was washed, chemises had buttons on, stockings were darned. New

clothes lay on chairs and boxes and in open drawers, and the Bollins household was in darkness and asleep.

As the actual moment of the ceremony drew near, Emmie was merely nervous in a vague way. She wanted to do what she had to do in a manner to deserve praise, but in any case not to merit fault-finding. Her family tried her. They could not concentrate on her because they were all so anxious about their own appearances and conduct.

But they were ready at last, and the house, as they left it, Mr. Bollins locking the door and putting the key in his pocket, " was a sight "— Mrs. Bollins' expression.

In the cab, Emmie was the central figure again to mother and sister, for they really pictured her in the scene. But Mr. Bollins uttered frequent little coughs and pushed his thin chest out as he thought of himself walking down that church with his daughter on his arm to give her to Mr. Tim, while Mr. Booke, Mr. and Mrs. Holten, Mr. and Mrs. Grass, Miss Booke, Mr. Saxton, Mrs. Holland, Mr. and Mrs. Ridley, Mr. Every, Dr. and Mrs. Mellor . . . he began licking his lips as he thought of all these really important people watching him, Sam Bollins, a body-maker at T. Booke & Son's, walking down the church with his daughter on his arm . . . well, they'd have to say he was dressed well; dressed, in a way, as well as any of 'em, for that matter; and they'd have to go a jolly long way before they'd find a prettier girl than his daughter Emmie — and she'd got her head screwed on all right, too. She had that. She'd show 'em. He could have done things if he'd only had the chance — half a chance. Well, he wasn't in the background to-day, for instance, eh? What? . . .

Emmie was almost calm as they drew up at the church gates. She knew she was tastefully dressed in her travelling costume; there was neither pretence nor tawdriness about it. Besides, the tight-fitting bodice showed her figure, and the bustle behind was just the fashion.

Emmie felt fit for a ceremony. It would soon be over and she would be Mrs. Timothy Booke. She hoped her father would behave properly. . . .

She said to her mother, just before getting out of the cab:

"I expect some one'll show you to a seat, Mother."

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Bollins. "We shall be all right. Do you feel . . . all right?"

"Yes," said Emmie cheerfully.

Mr. Bollins coughed, tugged at his coat and shook himself. Emmie put her hand in his arm, bent her head slightly, and walked down the church with a neat blend of modesty and confidence.

"Emmie's all there," whispered Mr. Grass to his wife.

"She is that," whispered Mrs. Grass to her husband.

Tim was happy. Emmie was happy. Mr. and Mrs. Bollins and Sarah were happy, too, but a little too proud to be without a weak spot. The Booke family knew that people were saying: "After all, Emmie Bollins . . ." with nods; "what is she — after all?" or words to that effect.

To all outward seeming there were smiles and a deep interest and a chorus of very pleasant remarks, but the Bookes, who loved, above most things, to be able to boast, felt that this was no day of rejoicing for them save as capable people.

Mrs. Holten and Miss Booke and Mrs. Grass even, could look all people in the face, and few would dare to say anything disparaging about the connection with the

Bollins family that was being celebrated; but the Bookes did not hide their heads in the sand of self-delusion. They knew what was whispered behind their backs. They felt sore with Emmie accordingly. They jeered in their hearts at Sam Bollins as he walked down the aisle. They ignored Mrs. Bollins and Sarah as much and as long as they could. But the god of Public Opinion held great hold of them; they could not go too far. They had at certain moments to praise Emmie. She was healthy and a good worker and pretty, and as for money, well, they thought they had enough of that. They put a bold face on the matter to friends and foes and gnashed the teeth that Pride would set on edge.

Mr. Booke was serious almost all day, but not depressed. He seemed to have been observing keenly and shrewdly for some time, and was very cordial to Emmie as she and Tim went off on the start of their linked life's journey.

The wedding was naturally of an order to reflect credit on the Bookes. Timothy was willing to spend for the sake of his only son; his sisters saw that the whole affair made people comment favourably on the Booke family. Timothy talked to Samuel Bollins with no hint of the workshop.

"Suppose you've been here lots of times, eh, Sam?" he said in the afternoon, when they were out in the country, where all the guests had been driven in brakes.

"Yes, yes. . . . Used to come here when I was a lad."

"Nice, healthy spot. I remember once coming here" . . . and the two fathers chatted with friendliness and without restraint or affectation of any kind.

Mrs. Holten moved about with a most important air. She could not thrust down the effervescing feeling: "This is a Booke day; this is an occasion on which we

Bookes can lead, direct, guide and generally feel that to us is entrusted the task of entertaining these people. Also we feel that such a task could not have been in more capable hands and we mean to do our best to let these guests feel that they have had a most enjoyable day and that it was due to the superb managing ability of us Bookes."

And yet amidst the success of the picnic there was this biting reflection in the hearts of Mrs. Holten and Miss Booke and (in a lesser degree) of Mrs. Grass: "If it hadn't been Emmie Bollins! . . . If it had been Ellen Quillan, for instance — somebody we could have boasted about, with influential or, at any rate, important relatives, not one whose father is a journeyman, shirtsleeve hatter, like this Sam Bollins! . . ."

Mr. Bollins was quite content. He felt well, smoked cigars and noted no fly in the ointment.

Mrs. Bollins was not blind to the views of Mrs. Holten and Miss Booke. But she was prepared for them, and did not complain. Sarah called them cats, but admitted she had had a very good time. She said one thing that seemed to have wisdom in it:

"When our Emmie comes back," she remarked, as she sat with her father and mother talking over the events of the day, "she'll have to mind her p's and q's in that family or they'll give her what-for."

Mr. Bollins looked at a cigar he had brought away from the repast and wondered if he should smoke it now or keep it till Sunday. . . .

"Our Emmie's Mrs. Booke now. . . . Whatever they say, they can't alter *that*," he said.

PART TWO: THE HAPPY WIFE



PART TWO: THE HAPPY WIFE

CHAPTER XII

MR. BOOKE was as good as his word. He had a private fortune of about twenty-five thousand pounds, and he gave up house and business on his son's marriage. So that when Tim and his wife returned from their honeymoon they went home to Helston House and saw through the window the factory of which Tim was now the sole proprietor.

Mr. Booke had left most of the furniture behind him. His bedroom suite he took, also sundry portraits and pictures and odd articles which had some personal or sentimental value for him. He rented a house on the Manchester Road and Mrs. Bane went with him as his housekeeper.

Emmie realised vividly the change from the tiny place in Silton Street to Helston House. She did not express her opinion of the change to anybody outside the members of her family — and to them only with a neat discretion — but she was very much impressed by her new home.

Fortunately she was happy. She was warm-hearted and affectionate, and she and Tim suited one another. After the first few days of the honeymoon she knew she was of the tribe that is well married, and when she got in the cab at Ganton Station on the return, she felt that in her native town she would henceforward be a person of some importance.

She gave no gasping note of admiration or surprise when she was received at Helston House by Mrs. Bane,

who had come up specially to show her round, and by the little maid, who was to help her to keep the house clean. She behaved very calmly and easily, indulging in no affected hauteur or bending familiarity. She saw all the luggage was taken safely off and out of the cab, and when Mrs. Bane expressed a hope that she had had an enjoyable time, said "Yes, most enjoyable," and talked of the place very pleasantly, ending up by saying: "It seems a shame to have turned you out of here, Mrs. Bane."

"Not at all. I'm with the master. He's got a nice little place, you know. They're very nice houses in that terrace and won't give so much work as this. I'll show you round here, Mrs. Tim, when you've had some tea."

"Thank you. Yes, I shall be glad of some tea."

The tea, nicely set out in the dining-room, where there was that thick carpet and solid-looking furniture, made Emmie think: This is really mine. I am really and truly the mistress of this house. It isn't a dream or a fairy tale or something made up — it is real. This is my house — mine. . . . What a difference to the other!

She looked round almost too keenly for her watchfulness.

"Well, we're home at last," said Tim.

Emmie looked at him with fond eyes. It was due to him that she was here; but she did not think much of that view. He couldn't help it. She had appeared before him and he had to do what he had done.

"Yes," she said, smiling as she sat down without further hesitation in front of the teapot and thought what lovely china it was . . . and the cutlery . . . and what an expensive pot — silver, of course (it wasn't, being merely plated; but Emmie was not equal to all this yet), and the beautiful room! . . . But she kept her head at

a good level. "Aren't you glad of your tea, Tim?" She spoke as if tea was uppermost with her.

"Yes, I feel I can do with it."

She poured out the tea, realising she was presiding at her own table, in her own home, for the first time.

She sipped.

"Tea's refreshing."

"Yes. What are you going to have, Emmie?" asked Tim. "Some of this fish . . . plaice, isn't it? or there's some potted meat. Better have some fish, it's hot." He helped her.

She noted the fish knife and fork with which they were provided, the tasteful way the fish was served, the thin bread and butter on the plates with the nice doileys on them — almost like the hotel where they had stayed.

"Glad to get home, Emmie?" Tim asked.

"Ye-es. It was all right away," she smiled; they had been very happy.

"Ay . . . well, it's work to-morrow."

"Yes," and Emmie said to herself: "No more trimming, either."

After tea Mrs. Bane took Emmie through the house. She showed her rooms, cupboards where linen was stored, and food, and amazed Emmie more than she guessed — and she naturally guessed at a little. Emmie was astonished at the order and plenty in the house. There seemed to be so many things and contrivances and such places for things, from the great whitewashed, clean cellars to the ample bedrooms. Emmie had always had to move carefully at her old home for fear she knocked against a member of her family or a piece of furniture. Here there seemed to be plenty of room for everything and everything had a place.

Mrs. Bane was clearly proud to act as guide on this

occasion, and Emmie took the instruction as easily and naturally as she could. She felt almost thrilled at times, and wished "to look at that again," but checked herself. She would have plenty of time to see these things when Mrs. Bane had gone.

"I expect I've missed telling you all," said Mrs. Bane, "but if there's anything you want to know you can send Ada or call. I shall only be too pleased to tell you anything I know."

"Thank you," said Emmie. "It's very kind of you."

"You're very welcome. You and Mr. Tim look very happy, and I'm sure I wish you well. Of course, there's Mrs. Holten and Miss Booke . . . well, perhaps I'd better say nothing. Least said, soonest mended, eh? And it doesn't do to let your tongue run away with you. The master can say things — Mr. Booke, I mean — but he has a sense of justice. As for his sisters . . . well, I could always get on with Mrs. Grass . . . but you'll get to know them soon enough — if you don't know 'em already. Oh! and Barley's our butcher. Of course, you'll go where you like, but I thought I'd tell you. I always get my groceries from Cross's, and the milk will come regular — that's Stone's: good milk, only he wants a bit of watching sometimes, or he'll give you short measure. I always weighed the beef, too, but of course you'll do what you like."

Mrs. Bane talked a great deal, and Emmie was really glad to hear all, for the hints were a guide. She began to feel her responsibilities as Mrs. Bane told her of Mr. Tim's likes and dislikes, of certain things she had been most careful to do and of others she had been equally careful not to do.

And in and amongst the hints, explanations and directions, there came the bits of gossip and intimacies.

"Do you like Miss Booke?"

"I haven't seen much of her," parried Emmie.

"No. And the more you see, the less you'll want to see. That woman! Only, don't ever say as I said anything — not that it matters. The master always says she's sour; and sour she is. She'll tell you this and that, and make out you're a perfect fool, and she's one that never did and can't do a thing wrong. That woman. . . . Oh! and Ada. . . . Don't you be afraid of speaking to her sharp. She's a good little girl, I will say that for her, but she wants sharpening up now and then. It's very nice of you to have her. . . ."

"I'm very glad," said Emmie.

"Well, I know she'll have a nice home, and it would have been a bit awkward in the new house, which isn't so large as this by a long way. I can easily manage it with a woman in once a week for the outside steps and the scrubbing. You know, I feel it when I get on my knees . . . at fifty-six, cold stones tell. And another thing, I can come and help you when you're preserving or anything like that. Mr. Tim likes black currant, and I always kept a pot or two of that for colds; very good if you've anything the matter with your throat; a tablespoonful in a cupful of hot water'll do a world of good. Mrs. Sellar has been charing and washing here for years. Of course, you'll please yourself, but she's honest and reliable. She wants a bit of watching when she's doing the blankets, and I used to give her a hand with the mangle — but of course, you'll please yourself. . . ."

When Mrs. Bane had gone, Emmie felt in a condition of delight, only very slightly troubled with anxiety. Somehow she felt she could manage. If there was any special cooking to be done Mrs. Bane would give her a

hand, and for the rest she was confident. So far as cleaning went she knew she need have no fears.

"A servant!" She, Emmie Bollins, with a servant. . . . That touched her. She had not expected that in the early days, for then she had thought that she and Tim would live in a much smaller house somewhere, and she would be able to manage with the occasional help of the charwoman. It was because Mr. Booke had handed over Helston House to Tim, and Ada, who was Mrs. Bane's niece, not being able conveniently to go to Mr. Booke's new house, was promptly engaged by Tim, who said "she could help Emmie."

Emmie's sensations when Mrs. Bane had gone were particularly pleasant. She had a greater sense of actual dominion and power than she had ever had before. On the honeymoon she had felt the power latent: Tim's purse sufficed to buy a willing and almost obsequious service. But this was the real thing. This was her home; she controlled it, she was mistress here. And such a home! . . .

The possession of the keys confirmed her impressions. As they rattled she could almost imagine she heard the ringing of bells of triumph.

Tim was far less disturbed, for he had come to an accustomed home, and his chief thought was Emmie. He loved to see her and know she was near him.

When he heard Mrs. Bane go and Emmie did not come to him at once, he went into the kitchen, which Emmie was regarding with an air of great admiration. It was so large, so comfortable, so light, so pleasant, for builders in Ganton knew in those days that the occupiers, even of big houses, passed more time in the kitchen than

in any other room in the house; it was, in fact, the living-room.

Mr. Booke had used the dining-room because he had a housekeeper, who naturally had to have the kitchen as her domain. Had his wife been alive, they would have lived mostly in the kitchen.

"What are you doing?" Tim asked. "Having a look round?"

"Yes."

He came up to her and put an arm round her.

"Mrs. Bane shown you everything?"

She looked at him winningly; this power to attract her husband gave her great pleasure. She nestled to him.

"Most things. I wanted to know where the things were."

"You'll soon find that out. And you can put them where you like, for that matter. Beginning to feel at home?"

She looked at him, one might almost say lovingly, certainly happily, and nodded.

"You'll soon get used to everything," he said.

And truly Emmie soon did get used to everything.

She felt a little strange; more, perhaps, than a little, when she got up the next morning in the nice, big, comfortable bedroom at Helston House.

She was not at a hotel now, where she would naturally expect her surroundings to be of a mildly luxurious order, but in her own home, and she put her feet on a well-carpeted floor; there was ample room to move about, plenty of space for her clothes, and they were in drawers and wardrobe most conveniently placed; the dressing-table was a handsome piece of furniture, and the whole invited to neatness and a good appearance.

Ada lit the fire, and Emmie was to cook the breakfast.

She got up just a little earlier than was quite necessary, for she did not wish to make Tim wait, and was most anxious to acquit herself well.

Tim turned over lazily.

"What's up?" he said. "Time to get up?"

"No, you needn't get up for a bit. I want to see what Ada is doing."

Tim did not answer. He watched Emmie with a gorgeous admiration. She moved about quickly and alertly, and seemed full of vitality. Before she put on her bodice she brushed her thick black hair, bending her head this way and that. Then she coiled it quickly, stuck some pins in it and gave a quick glance to see if it was presentable. At her old home, she had gone down to breakfast in a very untidy fashion, but she had more sense than to do that now.

"Feel like work?" said Tim.

She turned.

"Thought you'd gone to sleep again."

"Did you?" He sounded playful.

"Two eggs with your bacon? Work's all right."

"Yes."

"And do you like some bread in the fat — fried, I mean?"

Tim jumped out of bed, took her in his arms and kissed her.

"I like owt," he said, "if you give it me."

"Ada'll hear you," she said.

"I don't care a brass farthing what Ada hears."

"Let me go, Tim," she said, really anxious to do her work. "Are you going to get up? Because if you're not, get into bed again; you'll catch cold standing in your nightshirt like that."

"I'll get up," he said.

As Emmie went downstairs, she felt she was happier than she had ever imagined. To be loved as Tim loved her, in this beautiful home, too!

But the moment she set foot in the kitchen she became intent on her work.

Ada was outside, cleaning the steps that led into the yard. The fire was burning in the grate, which was black and shiny, with the steel parts beautifully polished. The cleanliness struck Emmie. They hadn't been dirty at home; she never thought so, but this was different. There were no loose ends here, slovenliness did not show its head. And what a splendid grate!

She got out the bacon and the frying pan, which hung on a nail over the sink, was clean and fit for instant use. Emmie remembered that theirs usually rested in the coal place and had, as often as not, bits of coal in it, which were served up with the bacon, and accepted as naturally as the rind.

As she cooked the breakfast, she went to the dining-room and saw that Ada had laid the table. Emmie thought quickly: We could have managed in the kitchen. . . . In winter it would save a fire, too, some coals and work. . . . And then the picture of her and her husband sitting in the dining-room to breakfast while Ada, the maid, answered the call of the bell, tickled her. She looked in the direction of the works, and thought if some of those in the trimming-room could see her! . . . But she bustled about. The bacon was done to a turn. She broke the eggs deftly, and hesitated about having one herself, thinking the bacon, with a piece of fried bread, would do for her. But she quickly decided for the egg; she could afford that. She'd do with one rasher of bacon and Tim could have two. She was rather surprised that she had to be coming to little discussions at

every other moment. She had thought things would decide themselves, once she was settled. She wasn't troubled; she could always make up her mind.

She heard Tim come downstairs.

"Ready for your breakfast?" she said, going to the door of the dining-room.

"I am that, if it's ready for me. No hurry."

"It's ready." And then she found herself once more questioning herself: should she take off her apron for breakfast or not? She took it off.

At first, economy of washing (a thing ingrained into her at home), suggested she should apportion Tim's breakfast and hers on separate plates and carry them into the dining-room; but she remembered that Mrs. Bane hadn't done that with the fish. So she put all the bacon and eggs on one dish and set them before Tim. She poured out the tea.

"Well, I've had a jolly good breakfast," said Tim, as he rolled up his table napkin.

"Have you?" said Emmie, very pleased.

"I have. And now I'll go and do some work. I expect father'll pop in: he's sure to come to the works."

Emmie had to think of what to do and the order in which it should be done. There was the house to clean and the dinner to cook. She had made up her mind about the dinner. Lancashire hot pot and rice pudding. She wasn't going to tell Tim what his meals would consist of; she would surprise him. She had not had too much practise in cooking, and her choice of dishes was not very varied; but with a joint on Sunday and cold meat Monday and a hash or stew or something of the kind on Wednesday, she felt she could manage on Thurs-

day, Friday and Saturday. Folk lived plainly in Ganton.

She had, however, provided herself with a cookery book, but felt she did not want anybody to know she used it. She did not mind Ada, but she preferred, for the moment, that no grown-up people saw her. They'd probably say she knew nothing, and could do nothing. . . .

She took the book out of her box, and found a convenient linen drawer in the kitchen in which to keep it. She consulted it now, in the making of the hot pot, and found that the compilers apparently didn't know anything about the Lancashire dish. When she turned to the index, she saw the variety of the contents was astounding, for the catalogue began at "Absesses" and ended at "Yearly Tenancies" and "Yorkshire pudding." Emmie put the book away with some scorn; it wasn't any good to-day.

She felt the responsibility of her position. She had to manage that house, including Ada, and see that Tim was well looked after and that the domestic arrangements escaped adverse criticism.

She quickly made up her mind about certain things: the bedroom, the cooking of the dinner, the cleaning of the dining-room. She put on a big apron, set Ada to wash up the breakfast things and made the bed herself. . . .

As she flung back the bedclothes, she thought of her new life. What a difference from trimming! This was life. One day you lived in a small house, putting up with all sorts of makeshifts and contrivances and inconveniences, and the next you were married, mated to a man, had a home and the whole character of your life was changed!

She gloried in the change.

Ada came to her.

"Miss Booke's downstairs."

Emmie looked up.

"Miss Booke. . . . Does she want to see me?"

"Yes."

"All right. . . . I'll be down in a minute."

Ada turned to go.

"Where is she?" Emmie almost whispered.

"In the dining-room."

"Right."

Emmie wondered: Miss Booke . . . what has she come for? See what she can, eh? She pulled a face, then went to the glass and saw her hair was tidy. Should she go down as she was or take off her apron? As she was — why not? It was morning, and if Miss Booke or anybody else called in the morning they would know she was working.

Emmie went downstairs.

"Good morning," she said.

"Good morning," said Miss Booke amicably, coming forward with hand outstretched.

They shook hands. Emmie wondered if she was going to be kissed, and felt sure Miss Booke thought of it for one moment, and then decided not to.

"I was just on my way to the butcher's, and as I knew you were back, I thought I'd just look in and see how you were," said Miss Booke.

Emmie nodded and smiled.

"You're looking well," said Miss Booke. "Did you enjoy your trip?"

"Very much, thanks."

"Nice place. What was the hotel like?"

"Very comfortable."

"Yes, I thought it would be. I don't suppose you've stayed often at hotels, have you?"

"Not often."

"Your first, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"It makes a difference, marrying somebody like Tim. You're lucky."

Emmie pressed her lips together.

"This nice house, too," continued Miss Booke. "It wants a bit of looking after."

"All houses do," said Emmie.

"Yes, but you don't find very many like this in Ganton," said Miss Booke quickly. "And it's such a change for you — after that little house you lived in in Silton Street. You'll want a few hints now and again. . . . Well, as you're Tim's wife, I'll help you what I can. What are you getting him for dinner to-day?"

Emmie paused.

"I think I can manage that," she said.

"I should hope so, indeed; I should that. If you couldn't cook him a dinner, it would be something. But he wants nice cooking and nice serving. You know what would do in a, er — well, in a tiny place, won't do for Tim Booke."

"No. But, of course, if Tim wants anything, I think he's old enough to speak for himself, don't you?"

Miss Booke smiled sourly.

"Some men don't speak for themselves: they put up with things. It's sometimes the duty of relatives to see they're not put on."

"Have you come," said Emmie, gathering courage, "to see Tim isn't put on?"

"I didn't say that," returned Miss Booke. "And I don't think it's nice of you to put it that way. I'm Tim's

aunt. I can surely say something for his good and yours — and I shall. I think it's the duty of relatives to say the word in due season. Prevention's better than cure. Besides, you might easily blunder, having just given up trimming to come and manage this house. Oh! I'm not one to let things happen for want of a bit of plain speaking. I believe in speaking out. There's many a man and woman gone wrong because somebody was afraid to say the right word at the right moment. You can't expect to do things exactly as they should be done all in a minute — how can you? You were trimming a fortnight ago, and now you're housekeeping to a Booke. . . . I assure you I shan't keep silent if I see things aren't what they ought to be."

Emmie went red, then white, and swallowed with difficulty.

Miss Booke stood up rigidly.

Emmie preserved silence.

Miss Booke said: "I'm quite willing to be friends. I'm willing to help you. You're married now, and that can't be undone. You're one of the family, and you'll be expected to behave accordingly. If I offer to tell you anything that isn't pleasant, it will be entirely for your own good and out of a strict sense of duty. Nothing will stop me doing what I consider to be my duty."

Still Emmie was silent.

"I suppose Tim's in the works," said Miss Booke.

"Yes."

"Has this room been done yet?"

Emmie drew herself up.

"I'm very busy," she said. "I've got a lot of work to do and I don't want Tim to have to wait for his dinner. You can sit down if you like, but if you'll excuse me, I'll get on with my work."

Miss Booke sniffed.

"I don't want to sit down. And I don't want to interfere with him, let alone make you late with Tim's dinner. But I should have thought you would have spared a few minutes to entertain your husband's aunt when she called. However, I'm very glad to see you're working, and I hope you'll do your best to make Tim a good wife." She turned to go. "You and Tim, now that you're married, must come and have tea with me some Saturday or Sunday. . . ."

When Miss Booke had gone, Emmie sat down and was ready to weep. She was literally on the verge of tears. They welled in her eyes — and then she smiled and got up. "The old cat!" she said. "The old cat! Well. . . ." And then she was near tears once more. To be talked to like that. A perfect humiliation! . . . What was she getting for Tim's dinner? And that room. . . . Emmie looked round; it appeared tidy. Then she looked on the mantelshelf — dust! It was there, plain enough — dust! There was a mark where a finger had been. Oh! the prying thing! The interfering creature!

Emmie felt very cross about that dust. The room hadn't been done, and now Miss Booke would perhaps think it had, and that Emmie was dirty.

Emmie felt furious. Tackled like that, too. Just because she had been a trimmer!

She broke down then. She wept bitterly and choked her sobs in her apron. It wasn't fair saying things to her like that. She was doing her best; she would do her best . . . just because she had lived in a little house and been a trimmer and had married Tim. . . . He had wanted her. . . . He'd run after her more than she'd run after him. . . .

Emmie stopped crying. The emotion ceased to shake her.

She was married; they couldn't alter that. . . . What did it matter what Miss Booke said?

She looked at the ring on her finger: it comforted her. Married. . . . Mrs. Timothy Booke. . . . No, not all the Bookes in the world could alter that. And what was more, she — Emmie — was not going to be lectured by them, either. If Miss Booke or Mrs. Holten started that game they'd find some one else could play it as well as they. . . .

Emmie got up and went into the kitchen, where Ada was wiping pots.

"Finished, Ada?"

"Nearly," said Ada faintly, as if she had washed away her energy with the dirt on the dishes.

"Well, when you've done that, do the dining-room. Put plenty of tea leaves on the floor and sweep it well, and see there isn't a speck of dust anywhere when you've finished."

Ada looked up and nodded feebly.

Emmie went upstairs to finish the bedroom, thinking all the time of Miss Booke and her tongue — and the stair rods. She stopped to examine them, three-cornered things looking so solid, so different from the thin things they had at home, in Silton. . . .

The next minute as she shook the bolsters and put them back in their place she was singing:

> "White wings they never grow weary
> They carry me cheerily over the foam. . . ."

CHAPTER XIII

EVERY succeeding day seemed to Emmie a day of happiness. This delightful atmosphere that seemed to surround her refused to leave her. Tim as a husband was glorious; married life was glorious; the new home was glorious; life was a glorious reality.

Tim was happy too, and his happiness reflected on Emmie, though it was, in a way, not equal to the emotional intensity she felt on her own account.

Emmie, cooking breakfast, sweeping, bed-making, dusting, was Emmie, happy and radiantly content. When she walked out and people nodded to her or spoke, she had more content than self-consciousness about her, even though she felt they were saying "Mrs. Tim Booke. . . ."

Her mother and sister called one evening at Helston House, and Emmie showed them over the place, opening drawers here and cupboards there, delighting to show them all the fine things and contrivances. Mrs. Bollins moved about in a state of grave elation. Her daughter was mistress here. . . .

Sarah was impressed to the point of envy. The comments, at times, were from a Silton Street point of view.

"This house and all this furniture will want a lot of looking after. . . . Think of the windows. . . . And the carpets. . . . The curtains alone, for that matter. . . . It isn't all honey, marrying a Booke," said Sarah, just a little willing to see the fly in the ointment.

"No. But you don't get honey without doing something for it," said Emmie.

"I don't know that I should like a big house like this,"

Sarah said, shaking her head as if she were somewhat in awe.

"I can manage all right," said Emmie. "It's only getting used to it."

"You'll manage," said Mrs. Bollins, "with Ada. You must see she works. And a charwoman for your washing. . . . You're lucky, Emmie."

Emmie shook herself confidently.

Mr. Booke called almost daily. He did not stay long, but he came in familiarly through the yard and kitchen door. Emmie felt he was beginning to like her, though he never said anything definite in that respect. He looked at her critically very often, and quietly drew her out, as if he would try to probe her heart and head.

She liked him because, although he could say sharp and bitter things if he chose, he did not say them to her. He walked into the kitchen when she was cooking.

"Morning, Emmie."

"Good morning." She was very pleasant.

"Getting your husband's dinner ready?"

"Yes. Won't you sit down?"

"I must be off in a minute."

But he sat down.

She went on with her preparations.

"Managing all right?" he asked.

"Yes."

They were silent for a moment, and Emmie looked at him in that curiously attractive feminine way of hers. She caught his eye and smiled.

"Ay . . ." he said. "Well, I'll be off. . . . Just came in to say good morning."

"You're in a hurry."

"No. But I don't want to hinder you. I'll pop in

at night again, when you're not so busy. . . . Morning."

"Good morning. . . . Come and have some dinner when you want," she said. "You're always welcome — only let me know in time." Emmie gave the invitation on the spur of the moment, and Mr. Booke was pleased.

"I've got a dinner being got ready at home. . . . Thank you all the same. . . . I'll have a cup o' tea with you now and again."

"Do."

And when he had gone Emmie thought of the situation. Here she was inviting Mr. Booke to dinner, and telling him to come to tea. . . . Well, what was that? Nothing now.

She had little trials with other members of the Booke family. Mrs. Grass was pleasant, asked her all sorts of questions about the honeymoon and the house and herself. But she was friendly, and Emmie was glad to gossip.

Mrs. Holten called, but kept a kind of superior atmosphere about her, even though what she said was not unpleasant or annoying. She proceeded a great deal by catechism and made Emmie feel that she had to give an account of herself, but the answers were, for the most part, received with a certain tolerance.

Emmie said to Tim:

"Mrs. Holten's been."

"Well, and how did you get on with Aunt Jane?"

There was a hinted chuckle in Tim's question, as there was a suspicious humour in Emmie's tone.

"All right."

"All right, eh?" He filled his pipe and looked at her with affection as his eyes twinkled.

Emmie screwed up her mouth and smiled.

"She wanted to know what they charged us at the hotel."

"Good Heavens! Is she thinking of going?"

"And what we had for dinner."

He lit his pipe.

"And if I get my meat from Barley's."

He smiled and puffed.

"And if Cross was our grocer. And if Stone still served us with milk. And if I thought the grate was a good one. She said she reckoned it one of the best in Ganton. And whether I was going to wash Monday or Tuesday, and if Mrs.——"

"That'll do," said Tim.

Emmie smiled.

"That's Aunt Jane all over," said Tim. "You should tell her to go to Owdham when she asks so many questions."

"Would you?"

"I would that."

"You wouldn't."

"Wouldn't I?"

"No."

"Come here." Emmie had pushed her face very near to Tim's, in a most provoking and tempting way.

Tim stretched out his arms and Emmie ran behind a chair. Tim followed.

"I'll show you what I will do," he said.

Emmie gave a tiny little cry, and then put her hand to her mouth. Tim had caught her now and drawn her to him.

"Ada," she whispered.

"What's Ada," said Tim scornfully. "Now say what you said before." He held her tight with one arm and lifted her chin.

She loved to be held like this. She enjoyed the physical contact herself, as well as relished the sensation that Tim loved it too. She looked at him roguishly.

"I'll say what I want," she said tantalisingly.

He made a pretence of hitting her. Then he turned up her face and kissed her.

"Th'art a bonny 'un," he said, in a tone she loved.

Then she threw an arm round his neck and kissed him.

"Aren't we soft?" she said, a moment afterwards.

"I'm not," he said. "You might be."

She laughed.

"You're the worst," she retorted. "Oh! And there's something else: we're to go to supper to your Aunt Jane's on Sunday."

"Oh! damn!—"

"Sh! You naughty! About your Aunt Jane, too. . . ."

"Well. . . . Oh! well, we might as well get it over. I reckon we'll have to go round and then have them here, and then ——"

"Well?"

"Then they can go to Owdham, for all I care."

But the visit to Mrs. Holten's was by no means a casual affair for Emmie. She did not tell Tim of her anxieties, though he probably guessed them, imagining the visit as a worry to her.

Emmie both wanted to go and wished to escape the visit. She wanted to go because she was Mrs. Timothy Booke and desired to do all that such a personage ought to do, and to fill her position adequately. But she was still liable to smart under the tongues of Mrs. Holten and Miss Booke if they were inclined for adverse criticism or lecturing.

Emmie took care over her appearance, for she relied

instinctively for a certain amount of sympathy or respect on the "pretty woman neatly dressed." Also, she knew that untidiness would simply plunge her into the bog of gibes.

She was quite happy, however, as she walked out of Helston House beside her husband. She was very pleased to be seen beside Tim, and if she assumed a dignified air she was sufficiently self-conscious to think of herself as Mrs. Timothy Booke and to fancy that those who saw her recognised her in that capacity.

As she walked up Silton Street past her own home, she nodded to her mother, who was sitting on a chair near the door.

Mrs. Bollins said "Hello!"

"Can't stop," said Emmie.

"Enjoying a bit of fresh air?" said Tim to his mother-in-law.

"Yes . . . a bit," said Mrs. Bollins, coming to the door.

"Father and Sarah out?" said Emmie.

"Your father's gone a walk; Sarah's upstairs."

Emmie smiled and nodded. Mrs. Bollins did the same.

"G'night," said Tim.

"Good night," said Mrs. Bollins, and she stood at the door of the little house, watching her son-in-law in frock coat and silk hat walk beside her daughter fashionably dressed. Neighbours also came to the door and looked.

Mrs. Loman, across the road, shouted:

"She looks very well."

"Yes."

"Ay. . . . Nice couple."

"Yes."

"She can dress, too."

"She'd always good taste."

"And she needn't be afraid of a shilling or two, either, now."

"No."

Emmie turned round and waved her hand to her mother. She knew she would be watching, and was pleased to see there were others watching too.

The Holtens lived in Stockport Road in a semi-detached house of unpretentious appearance, having a small garden in front, and a fairly large one behind. It was furnished with some regard to value, though lacked the simplicity that characterised Helston House, perhaps because of Mr. Booke's dislike for "fal-lals"— a term he used to designate small ornaments and merely ornamental articles of furniture. But Mrs. Holten was house proud. She was a capable manager and would almost invite you to look round and see if you could find any dust where it ought not to be.

The maid gave Emmie a hint of the capability in the place. She opened the door as it ought to be opened to guests, not in Ada's timid, suspicious way. Emmie noted this: she must drill Ada — if Ada could be drilled! Tim's hat and stick were taken from him, a door was thrown open, and then Emmie found herself responding to the maid's "Will you come this way, please?" and walking upstairs.

Emmie went with dignity, but cast glances from left to right. Everything certainly did look clean.

The maid knocked at the bedroom door and a voice called out, "Come in."

"Mrs. Timothy," said the maid.

Emmie walked in.

"Here you are," said Mrs. Holten, advancing and

shaking hands and then kissing her without hesitation. "Tim downstairs?"

"Yes."

Miss Booke was there. She also kissed Emmie because her sister had, and Mrs. Grass kissed her willingly.

Mrs. Grass turned to Miss Booke and continued a conversation. . . . "So I told her if that sort of thing was to go on. . . ."

"That's a very nice hat, Emmie," whispered Mrs. Holten, as Emmie put it on the bed, noticing the fine bedspread and the bonnets of Mrs. Grass and Miss Booke.

"Yes. I like it myself," said Emmie.

"H'm. . . . Get it in Manchester?"

"Yes — at Madame Marie's."

"I know — Oxford Street. She's dear, isn't she? How much did you pay for it?"

"Thirty-five shillings."

"What!"

The moment Emmie heard that exclamation she knew she had blundered. Why hadn't she said twenty-five, or that she didn't remember.

"Thirty-five shillings," said Mrs. Holten, and she turned towards her sisters. "I don't wonder it's a nice hat." The tone had a lilting stab.

"Thirty-five shillings," repeated Miss Booke, with the air of the shocked and pained. "Thirty-five — you'll ruin Tim if you go on at that rate."

"Tim didn't buy it," said Emmie, a trifle quickly.

"I didn't say he did," replied Miss Booke; "I said if you go on at that rate."

Mrs. Grass said quickly: "I suppose it was for the honeymoon, eh, Emmie."

"Yes," said Emmie, very quietly and feeling badly treated. Just because she had spent all that money to

please them — to have a hat fit for the occasion and the family, and now they criticised it! . . . If she'd bought a cheap one they'd have said she disgraced them. . . . She was flushed.

"Of course, it's very nice, very nice, indeed," said Mrs. Holten, who wished to smooth Emmie, now that Miss Booke had rushed in with her austere battery. "Have you and Tim had a walk? or have you just come from home?"

"We've come straight from home," said Emmie, with a certain dignity.

"I was wondering if you'd got a good appetite." Mrs. Holten now spoke very friendly.

"Emmie's young," said Mrs. Grass. "I expect she always has a good appetite. I remember how I used to eat at her age. I couldn't do it now; don't want to, for that matter, for I'm quite fat enough."

"You're not fat, Sophia," said Miss Booke.

"Fat enough," said Mrs. Grass.

"Well, come on downstairs," said Mrs. Holten, "or they'll think we've forgotten them."

Emmie wiped out — at any rate, for the moment — the little incident that had ruffled her. As she was going downstairs, Mrs. Grass put her arm round her waist and nodded pleasantly.

"You must come and have supper with us next," she said.

"Thank you," murmured Emmie, and she felt happier at once as the scent of cigars and the sound of men's voices reached her. She had the feeling of secure serenity in the presence of men.

And they rose to greet her most cordially.

Mr. Booke just shook hands and nodded, but he was genuinely hearty. Mr. Holten was most polite.

"Well, Emmie . . . very glad to see you. The latest addition to the family . . . you're very welcome."

Mr. Grass nodded very affably. "*How* are you? Haven't seen you since you came back."

Emmie felt now very comfortable. She sat near Tim, and the conversation launched at them first dissolved in laughter and good humour into other channels.

The men discussed business and politics and cricket. The ladies talked of domestic affairs and other people. Emmie listened and joined in the conversation when she was appealed to and felt, on the whole, quite comfortable.

And all the time she kept noting ornaments on the mantelshelf — two Dresden figures which Emmie liked, but thought cheap, and a fairly large dark blue ornament which she liked, and a Sheraton clock which she considered neat, the overmantel which matched the clock — and then she noticed the furniture matched the clock too. She thought that very smart, very clever. . . . She wondered if the clock had been bought with the chairs and sofa or got separately. And the curtains, deftly hung from the mantel-board arrested her attention. She saw how they were done . . . yes, she would do hers like that — she didn't care for that browny-red colour, besides, it wouldn't go with their furniture. . . . This was a very nice room, too. . . . She had felt its picturesqueness when she came in. It was striking and yet not gaudy.

And she was interrupted in her observations by the march to the kitchen to supper. The kitchen was a big room, providing ample accommodation for a large party, whereas the so-called dining-room was a comparatively small affair and was inconvenient in these Sunday evening gatherings.

And how clean and bright even this kitchen looked!

Emmie was struck with it the moment she entered. There was a shininess and polish even about the worn things that showed care and attention. The white linen was white and spotless, and all the things in the room had the air of having been thoroughly overhauled and kept well in hand.

Mrs. Holten indicated the guests their seats, with a little self-consciousness. She could never wholly forget that she was a capable housewife, and so rather offered all she did, not only as a hostess, but as a model.

Her sisters knew her. Mrs. Grass, too easy-going to rival her, said: "Jane's clever, but she serves her cleverness with all she does." And Miss Booke had said: "Jane would manage Buckingham Palace if they'd give her a chance — and they'd live well and save money, too." The men, as they came into the room, glanced at the table.

"Makes one feel hungry, Jane," said Mrs. Grass, with a laugh.

Mrs. Holten was pleased.

"I hope you'll enjoy it," she said. "Emmie . . ." she touched a chair. "Will you sit here?"

Emmie saw on the big dresser, that seemed to be a fixture near the window, plates and dishes that could be easily handled when the first course had been disposed of.

Emmie looked at the ample grate and saw a big, well-polished copper kettle and an iron one. All the fire-irons shone like burnished steel. Everything seemed in its place, toasting fork, brush, a square thing to put on the hot handle of the kettle. . . . The pictures on the wall looked "nice" to Emmie, principally because they had neat oak frames. And then she had a strange thought: "These Holtens have their meals in the kitchen. We don't. I

don't. I have mine in the dining-room." She chortled. Well! After the way they'd behaved. . . .

The next minute she was being helped to veal and ham, and she observed the dexterous way Mrs. Holten carved, the flowers on the table, the way the knives and forks and spoons and forks were laid, the crockery — but that was not so nice as hers. Emmie began to feel that Mrs. Holten had not got all the leading.

Mr. Grass began talking of the Manchester Ship Canal. He was an engineer, and the plan interested him. He thought it would cost more than the five millions reckoned. There were always difficulties in big undertakings of this kind. . . .

Mrs. Holten turned to Emmie: "Enjoying it?" and she smiled very pleasantly.

"Yes, thank you." And Emmie was enjoying herself. She was interested in the men's talk, in the general atmosphere, in the fact that she was well dressed and treated as an equal by these ladies who were amongst the leading ladies of Ganton.

As the meal progressed and the sweets were being served, Miss Booke said to her sister: "Jane, you should show Emmie a few things in cooking: that apple charlotte of yours, and your potted meat ——"

Mrs. Holten looked pleased; she liked her abilities to be noticed.

"Yes," she said; "I'll do anything for you, Emmie, like that."

Tim said, almost casually: "I don't know why you want to be teaching Emmie this and that; she can manage for me very well, thank you."

Emmie blushed, but wanted to kiss Tim, not because he saved her being shown how to make apple charlotte or to pot meat like Mrs. Holten (for really she was glad

to learn anything useful), but because he stuck up for her before people. It showed he cared for her.

"I don't want to interfere, Tim," said Mrs. Holten mildly.

"No, Aunt Jane. But that's just what I feel."

Miss Booke said:

"And I'm sure *I* don't. I was only doing it for the best. But you can't help some people."

"Have some of this junket, Emmie," said Mr. Holten, who wished to avoid scenes. "It's good for you."

Emmie would have had some even if it had punished her, or gone without it if she had been famished at that moment without care or reck. She was in her innermost soul rejoicing over the discomfiture of Aunt Maria by Tim.

She said, "No, thank you," first to Mr. Holten, but on being pressed had some "junket," really because she thought she would like to try it, and not because she was taking some she would please her host, but in those days it was considered polite to refuse and very hospitable and natural and proper to persuade and press people to take the food one had prepared for them.

When Emmie walked home with Tim, she felt very happy. This life, she thought, suited her. She could behave in the company of the Bookes just as well as they could, for that matter. As for Miss Booke . . . well, you couldn't say enough about *her* and her lecturing. . . . And Emmie felt she would set her tables just as well as Mrs. Holten or Mrs. Grass or Miss Booke — and cook as well, too. She was happy, not only because she was very comfortably married and had a kind and indulgent husband and happiness seemed to float about her as if it were her proper atmosphere, but she was feel-

ing her personality breaking through this new social crust. She felt a confidence in herself that gave her a fine assurance. These people could have their little gibes now and again and attempt to teach her, but Emmie felt within her a capability equal to theirs, equal to Mrs. Holten's — equal to anything she might be called on to do. She had always been somebody in the trimming-room, and now she felt she was really somebody in the society of those who employed trimmers and thought no small beer of themselves.

CHAPTER XIV

TIM had, of course, the whole responsibility for the success or failure of "T. Booke & Son" on his own shoulders. Mr. Booke came to the works almost every day. He generally managed to see Emmie if it were only for a moment, and he passed his time going from counting house to warehouse, from fur blowing or wool forming to body-making and finishing. He talked to the men familiarly and seemed to go about as a man would who loved a garden and noted a rose tree here and a fuchsia there, a magnolia, and so on. He had lived with the scent of hat-making in his nostrils ever since he could remember and he had no desire to lose the odour now.

Tim had to do the buying — the buying of wool and fur and silks and leathers and galloons. He had to decide shapes and order blocks and see that the money came in and that the business of T. Booke & Son did not suffer in his hands.

He talked over business with his father, but the conversation was always conducted with a certain amount of delicacy, for Mr. Booke never offered advice. Tim would occasionally say: "I'm doing that" and "I think I shall try that," but never actually asked for counsel or encouragement, and Mr. Booke would nod and express no opinion, as a rule. It was as if he said, "Well, it's yours now, and you must do what you think fit, relying on your own judgment."

Tim was equal to his task. He had had a sound and thorough training in the business and showed no diffi-

dence or weakness in taking sole control. He appointed a man, who had been with the firm some years, as his manager. He was a keen, rather high-browed, shrewd-eyed man, not much older than Tim, steady and energetic, Ernest Mullins by name. Tim still travelled a little and he thought it as well to have some one quite responsible in the factory while he was away.

It happened that now and then Tim would ask Mullins to come in the house when the works were closed so that they could talk business matters over more comfortably. And as they sat and smoked their pipes and talked of the price of wool or fur, of this competitor's effort, or a new process, of work people and other details, Emmie sat and listened.

She and Mullins naturally knew each other. He had called her "Emmie" when she trimmed, and she had always referred to him as Ernest Mullins, even if she had not actually addressed him as Ernest.

He turned to her once when he and Tim had been discussing something, and she had listened without saying anything.

"A bit dry for you, all this . . . Mrs. Tim."

"Oh! No," she said. "It's very interesting."

"She knows all about it," said Tim.

Emmie looked up from her sewing and smiled.

"I ought to know something," she said.

"It's our bread and butter, at any rate," said Ernest, and then he plunged once more into business details with Tim.

Emmie liked to hear them talk. It gave her the feeling of actually being behind the scenes. She took a keen interest in what was said, and occasionally surprised Tim by comments and suggestions.

"I'll make thee manager, Emmie," he said one day, jokingly.

"Might do worse," retorted Emmie.

Tim shook his head.

"You've got enough to manage at present. And there'll be more soon, eh?"

Emmie looked at him with an expression he liked and yet held in a little awe: it seemed so deep.

He put an arm round her.

"Which would you rather . . . a boy or a girl?"

"I don't know," she said.

"Twins?" he suggested.

"Go on!" she said, pushing him away playfully.

This was the next big fact in Emmie's life. As the time drew near for the little stranger's advent, Emmie had got quite accustomed to being Mrs. Timothy Booke. She could now greet her husband's aunts without nervousness or tribulation of any kind. She found she could manage her house well enough to allow Mrs. Holten or Miss Booke to call at almost any time and take her unawares without snatching at this and hiding that or wondering if they would notice such and such. . . . She could entertain with ease, and the hint of diffidence towards the elders was really pleasing to them.

Tim and she got on capitally. He had resumed his visits to the club, but he did not make it a religion to go there every night or feel ill at ease and uncomfortable if he stayed at home.

Emmie never said anything if, on these club nights, he came home late. For one thing, she rather liked the idea of her husband being at the club: it signified a social standing to her.

She waited up the first time.

Tim said: "You shouldn't have waited up."

"I didn't mind," she said. "I'd some sewing to do."

"You mustn't wait up again if I'm late, or I shall be uncomfortable."

"Go on with you! If I've got some work to do, what does it matter? And don't you worry about me when you're at the club; I'm not a child."

But Tim reduced his club-going to very occasional visits just before the baby was born. He and Emmie would walk at night slowly up and down Silton Street or out of Silton Street into Taylor Lane and along the quieter New Road.

Mr. Booke called daily to see Emmie and was concerned if he saw her looking tired.

"Emmie mustn't work too much now," he said to Tim, a month or so before the expected confinement.

"No. I've told her. Mrs. Wright's coming in next week."

"That's right. She must take care."

Both father and son were stirred with a wave of sentiment, but there was no clear expression of it. They were silent for a moment, and then to get out of the awkwardness, Tim said: "I think crowns'll go a deal fuller, Father."

"Ay. I thowt as much." And then, after a pause: "Reckon you'll have Dr. Everkith."

"Oh, yes. . . . I gave him the hint the other day."

"Ay. . . . H'm. . . . Very sensible. . . . Crowns going fuller, eh. . . ."—referring to the shapes of hats.

Mrs. Holten and Mrs. Grass and Miss Booke were prodigal of advice, particularly Miss Booke. But they were all genuinely solicitous; they desired her welfare sincerely. A Booke was to be brought into the world.

Emmie was, on the whole, rather pleased with the attention. She kept very well, felt rarely moody or subject to whims, was able to do a certain amount of housework and had the desires and appetite of a healthy woman.

Alice Cannell called to see her one evening. She had been once or twice before, but now that the jaunts together were ended the friendship lost its old intimacy. Still, whenever they met, they talked freely and pleasantly together and Alice told her escapades and excitements with a zest that Emmie thoroughly enjoyed.

It happened that Miss Booke and Mrs. Holten called that evening, and they bowed with a fine condescension to Alice — particularly Miss Booke. Mrs. Holten ventured to remark that for April the weather was not bad, considering the terrible storms we had in March. Mrs. Holten suggested the important lady being agreeable and free to one beneath her.

Alice was somewhat uncomfortable and wished that she was with Emmie alone, so that she could tell her about a chap she thought she would really make it up with: he was a real nice fellow. . . . As it was, she remarked carefully on the storms we had had in March; she had heard that thousands of sheep had been lost in Wales — a thousand or ten thousand. She wasn't sure which.

Miss Booke said authoritatively: "Ten thousand."

"Yes," said Alice, willing to accept any figure. "I wasn't sure."

"A big difference between ten thousand and one thousand," said Miss Booke, with austere correctitude.

Alice looked and felt chilled. She also was filled with a desire "to scratch that woman," but merely sat awkwardly on the edge of an apparently high chair and was annoyed she could not get her heels down properly.

Emmie was not at all disturbed. She found she could

listen to Miss Booke now without being upset as she used to be. Of course, Miss Booke was careful now not to say anything hurting to Emmie, but she could not repress her undoubted talent for advice, correction and advertisement altogether, just because her niece was going to have a baby.

Alice said she had to be going, for the atmosphere now was no longer congenial and she prepared to get out of it.

"I'll see you out," said Emmie, and went with her to the front door.

"Don't catch a cold now, Emmie," said Miss Booke, and she looked at her sister in a way to signify: What do you think of that? meaning it was almost preposterous for Alice Cannell to be shown out of the front door — the back door was surely good enough for her.

Emmie had chosen the front door of set purposes and design; she would let the Booke ladies see that any friend of hers was worthy of the front door.

Alice looked at Emmie in the hall.

"That woman!" she whispered. "I'd like to fill her mouth full o' paste." Then they both smothered a laughter that would, had it not been repressed, have rung through the house.

The silence was enough to tell Mrs. Holten and Miss Booke that something was being whispered. Miss Booke coughed loudly and unnecessarily.

Emmie and Alice, smiles on their faces, nodded at one another.

"Can you get on with her?" whispered Alice.

"Oh! Yes. You can't have everything."

"No, 'spect not. Well, 'olive oil,' and look after yourself."

They kissed.

"Come in just whenever you like," said Emmie.

"Well keep that vinegar bottle out," said Alice, with a nod and a grin, "and I'll come oftener."

When Emmie returned to the two ladies, Miss Booke said: "Does Alice Cannell come often?"

"Not so often as I'd like," said Emmie quickly, with a little inward chuckle as she added to herself: "That's one for you!"

Miss Booke drew herself up. Really. . . . But she held her peace. She thought she was behaving nobly in not continuing the discussion . . . at such a time, you understand. . . . Had things been normal, more might have been said.

Emmie every now and then was a little surprised at her own capacity. She had before been an industrious trimmer and had done her work well, earned quite good wages, dressed well and tastefully, and made most of her clothes. But she had had no standard of ability with which to judge herself. Now, she noted how she stood because she had had to do certain unusual things, and she found she did them with ease and satisfaction. She managed her house admirably — Mrs. Holten readily conceded that. She cooked, she washed, she arranged and ordered without any effort. These domestic matters seemed simple to her. And now, in her present condition, she was almost inclined to jeer at the women who made a martyrdom of childbearing.

"I could dance," she said to Tim one day.

Tim looked up: "By Gum! You'd better not."

"I'm not going to, silly. I only said I could."

"You're a marvel, Emmie; I hope you'll go through it all as well."

Emmie pulled a face.

"That'll be another thing."

Still she was getting into the way of thinking that if

she had anything to do she could do it — and do it well, of course.

Also she was beginning to feel that she could defend herself quite well, against Miss Booke and all Tim's relatives, if they attacked her. She wasn't going to be put on and she was not going to be told what to do nor talked at. Advice offered as a genuine aid with genuine good wishes behind it was one thing; advice strongly diluted with the proclaimed superiority of the giver was another, a very different thing. Emmie was beginning to press her lips together and raise her chin when face to face with Miss Booke.

She noted this attitude in herself, noted her growth in decision and the development of her abilities. She wondered for a moment if the child she was to bear was the cause of this mental expansion — and dismissed the idea almost at once. It was she herself that was developing like a plant in the sun.

She knew it. Undoubtedly she felt a little of this self-confidence in the excellent health she enjoyed, particularly within a few weeks of her confinement. She had, naturally, all sorts of tales, as well as counsel, poured into her ears, and most of the experiences she heard seemed those of feeble people or of those who had had to suffer. She had discovered her amazing vitality after marriage.

Both Mrs. Holten and Miss Booke were shrewd and observent enough to grasp the indisputable fact of Emmie's assurance and felt a mingled resentment and pride at it. She was only Sam Bollins' daughter — but she was also Tim's wife. They found it hard to praise her, and yet would not allow her to be attacked.

And Emmie, fully emerged from the chrysalis stage of diffidence went about gathering the honey of life in her

own glowing way and impressing those with whom she came in contact with a sense of her "aliveness."

Her mother and father almost came to regard her with awe, at least with the idea that she was not as she used to be, that she was changed, another and a greater Emmie. . . .

Mr. and Mrs. Bollins, exceedingly gratified that their daughter was Mrs. Booke and ready to talk of her at all times and seasons, yet showed a little reluctance at visiting Helston House too frequently. They feared Booke tongues a little, were somewhat afraid of what Mrs. Holten or Miss Booke might say—"they were never off the doorstep," or perhaps suggest they went there to get things, food for instance. And they had their pride.

Mrs. Bollins mentioned her desire at tea time.

"I think I'd like to go and see Emmie to-night; have you seen her to-day?"

"No!" There was always the chance that Mr. Bollins, from the yard of T. Booke & Son's, might see his daughter.

"It's getting near now," said Mrs. Bollins.

"Ay."

He was drinking tea out of a cup bereft of its handle and munching radishes which were set out in a saucer.

"I haven't been for some time," he said.

"No." There was a pause. Mrs. Bollins hesitated and then seemed to come to the conclusion that there was something to be said both ways and that it didn't matter. "Will you come with me?" she asked.

He drank his tea noisily, put a radish in his mouth threw the end in the fireplace, and after a pause, said: "I might. . . . Ay. . . . I might."

"It's no good going too late," she said. "I could have a talk with Emmie first. You could come after you've had a wash. You'd better put your other coat on too, hadn't you?"

He was sitting in his shirtsleeves, wearing a collar and tie as a concession to his relationship to the head of the factory where he worked, his boots were old and tied with string (to save the better pair he wore in the streets and out of the works generally, but the tea half hour was too short for changes of raiment) and the white apron which covered him from chest to shins was dirty in patches, as were his hands, with the dye of the hats.

He looked at himself.

"Yes." He was rather pleased to get into the better clothes he had, for since Emmie's wedding day he had had an extra suit.

"All right," she said. "I shall be gone when you get home. I'll leave the key."

Mrs. Bollins took a deal of trouble over her appearance when going to see Emmie, for there was always the chance that she might meet somebody of importance there — of importance from her point of view, naturally. Her hands were never quite clean, for she had got past that stage when she bothered to take care of them, but she could dress tastefully, for Emmie invariably helped with the choice of a dress.

As she left the key with Mrs. Black, her next door neighbour, she said: "Just going to see my daughter."

Mrs. Black, nursing the big iron key, said: "Oh, yes. She's keeping very well, I hear."

"I think so."

Mrs. Black nodded her head, signifying quite an intelligible prologue, and then said: "Soon, isn't it?"

"About three weeks."

Mrs. Black screwed up her face and conveyed other expressions in silent language. Mrs. Bollins nodded and then smiled. "And she's got everything she wants."

"Oh! Yes," said Mrs. Black. "That's a comfort."

"Yes. . . . Yes. . . . I reckon he'll be here smart — he's coming after me."

Mrs. Bollins was conveying to Mrs. Black the information that the key would not trouble her long.

"That's all right," replied Mrs. Black. "I'm not going out."

Mrs. Bollins smiled and went on her way, meeting in a couple of minutes Mrs. Tegginbottom.

"Nice night," said Mrs. Tegginbottom, a little observant woman, who said to herself, as she saw Mrs. Bollins dressed so neatly and cleanly: "Ah! Going to see her daughter."

"Very nice," said Mrs. Bollins. "I'm just going to see my daughter."

"I thought so. It's . . ." There were nods, very similar to Mrs. Black's. "Soon, isn't it?"

Mrs. Bollins smiled and nodded and seemed to convey information of a kind by her smiles and nods.

"She's keeping well, I hear," said Mrs. Tegginbottom.

"Very. But of course she has everything she wants," said the fond and very proud mother. Her daughter had everything she wanted!

And as she walked on Mrs. Bollins was very pleased she had occasion to speak to Mrs. Black and Mrs. Tegginbottom, and rather hoped she might have occasion to meet more acquaintances, so that she could remind them of her daughter who had everything she wanted.

Mrs. Bollins went in by the back door. She felt more comfortable going in there than at the front, and the side

door was neither one thing nor the other. Besides, the back door was familiar. With Sarah or her husband Mrs. Bollins would have gone where they wished.

Emmie was in the kitchen, putting some things on a "maiden." There was the familiar smell of washing and ironing, the warm, slightly damp atmosphere, and the pungent odour of burnt soap over which the iron was periodically run. A woman was ironing clothes at the table.

"Hello, Mother," said Emmie, going round and greeting her with a kiss.

Mrs. Bollins had come to see how Emmie was, to give her advice, to warn her about this, and tell her about that, but Emmie took possession of her at once.

"I'm glad you've come. Sit you down. This is Mrs. Wright."

Mrs. Wright was the daily help. Mrs. Bollins nodded her head and smiled.

"Doing a bit of ironing?" she said.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Wright affably.

"I'll help you, Emmie, with them," said Mrs. Bollins.

"No fear. Just you sit down and rest yourself. This is nothing."

"You shouldn't do too much."

"That's what I tell her," ventured Mrs. Wright.

Mrs. Bollins shook her head.

"Yes. We don't want any accidents."

"No," echoed Mrs. Wright. "Don't want no accidents now."

Emmie laughed.

"Accidents. We're not going to have any accident because I'm putting a few things on a maiden." The clothes horse was always referred to as a "maiden" in the Bollins family.

"I don't know so much about that . . ." and Mrs. Bollins had a most engrossing tale to tell about some one who had had a miscarriage because of some trivial and almost insignificant thing she had attempted when she was in a condition similar to Emmie.

And Mrs. Wright nodded her head with complete approval. She, too, had stories to tell of people she knew, very thrilling and interesting stories they were, too, all of them conveying the moral of care and ease.

Emmie laughed.

"You two! You'll give me the jumps soon. At any rate, I'm not going to be stopped doing things like this because Mrs. Somebody made a mess of herself through trying to pull down a window blind that stuck. You must stop and have some supper, Mother."

"Your father's coming too."

"Well, he can stop, as well; we've enough for both of you."

"Oh! But . . . it's a lot o' trouble."

"No trouble at all. Just you take your bonnet off — that suits you."

"Does it?"

"Yes. Don't you think so, Mrs. Wright?"

"Very nice. I noticed it when you came in."

Emmie went to her mother, untied her bonnet strings, put the bonnet on a little farther forward, while Mrs. Bollins sat submissive and pleased.

"Yes," said Emmie, as she looked at it again. "Very nice. Very neat . . . it's stylish, too, Mother. I'll put it here for the moment," and she put it on the dresser on some linen that was folded and ready to be put away.

Mrs. Bollins noticed how much older Emmie seemed. She was no longer a girl, but a grown woman; she moved and talked with authority.

"We'll have some toasted cheese," she said. "You like that, Mother, and so does father. I think we've enough cheese. . . ." She at once went to the cupboard near the fireplace.

"Now don't make any fuss, Emmie."

"Toasted cheese is no fuss. I don't think we've time for onions: they take so long——"

There was a knock at the door.

"Front door," said Emmie. "Sounds like Aunt Maria." She pushed her hands down her apron and gave an instantaneous and almost instinctive glance at herself. Aunt Maria could certainly send a thrill of sorts through people.

"I'll open the door," said Mrs. Bollins, rising and going away, quite pleased to show Miss Booke she was doing something in the fine house of her daughter's.

Emmie said: "Don't you bother," but, seeing her mother go, seriously acquiesced, particularly as Mrs. Wright (probably desiring to show Mrs. Bollins what a thoughtful woman she — Mrs. Wright — was about a house at a time like this), said: "You shouldn't run about too much, you know, Mrs. Booke."

Emmie uttered a little incoherent noise, signifying she would run about if she wanted.

Then Miss Booke's voice was heard at the door:

"You, is it?" with a fine volume of feeling on the pronoun.

Mrs. Bollins felt shrivelled almost at once.

"Yes," she muttered apologetically. "I was just sitting with Emmie in the kitchen."

"Is there nobody else in?"

"There's Mrs. Wright."

"Oh! . . . Couldn't she open the door?"

Mrs. Bollins was beginning to wonder if she had committed some horrible blunder.

"She was doing something," she muttered awkwardly.

"I was just passing," said Miss Booke, as if she had now discussed the opening of the door sufficiently. "I thought I'd just see how Emmie was."

The mother was pleased.

"She's very well, I'm thankful to say."

"She ought to be," said Miss Booke, going forward, "with a nice home like this."

"Yes," said Mrs. Bollins submissively.

Miss Booke walked into the kitchen.

"There you are," she said to Emmie. She nodded to Mrs. Wright.

"I thought it was you," said Emmie. "Sit down, won't you?"

"I'm not going to stay. I was passing and I thought I would just see how you are."

"I'm all right, thanks. Sit down, Mother." Emmie spoke cheerily, while Mrs. Bollins was standing in the attitude of a suppliant.

"You know," said Miss Booke, with an authoritative air, "this is no place for you, Emmie."

"This . . . my own kitchen — oh! I've got something to do here; can't do this in the dining-room."

"I wasn't meaning that altogether," said Miss Booke seriously, while Mrs. Bollins, sitting comfortably on a chair, wondered what the important Miss Booke was going to say to Emmie. "I was thinking of your condition. . . ." She shook her head. "This washing and ironing won't do you any good."

"Won't do me any harm, either," retorted Emmie quickly, as one refusing to be lectured. "The smell of

a bit of washing or the sight of a clean petticoat'll do me no harm."

Miss Booke clinked her lips together in a disapproving fashion.

Just then Tim came in.

He nodded to his aunt and mother-in-law.

"Are you frightened to be with a lot of women, Tim?" Emmie asked gaily.

"Frightened. . . . By Gum!"

She laughed. Mrs. Bollins laughed too, but looked furtively at Miss Booke to get a cue from her. Mrs. Wright said: "Eh . . . isn't she? Eh! . . ." Emmie went on lifting up linen and putting it on the maiden.

Miss Booke said: "I've just been telling Emmie she shouldn't be so much in this kitchen, just now, Tim. . . ."

"No. Well, she knows. . . . She looks healthy enough."

"H'm. . . . Ah, well. I'll be getting on," said Miss Booke.

"You've only just come," said Emmie.

"I only meant to call ——"

"Stop and have a bit o' supper," said Tim.

"No, thank you, Tim; no, thank you. I wouldn't dream of it at a time like this," and she looked at Mrs. Bollins. "Are you coming up the road, Mrs. Bollins?"

Mrs. Bollins looked in a minor agony.

"No! No!" said Emmie quickly. "Mother's going to stay and have a bit of supper: she comes so seldom."

Mrs. Bollins began to mutter something, but Tim said genially: "That's right. You'd better stay too, Aunt Maria; we can find enough to eat."

"No, thank you, Tim," she replied, with fine emphasis. "No, thank you; as I said before, not just *now,* thank you."

Mrs. Bollins felt like a criminal caught red-handed.

"Good night," said Miss Booke. "Good night, Emmie, and remember my warning. . . ."

And as the important lady went down the road, she was saying to herself: "Just what I thought; just what I expected. Those Bollinses will live on Tim. It will be first one and then the other. . . . T't, t't, t't. . . ." And she wagged her head and walked to her sister's so that she could talk the matter over with a fervour that would do justice to the topic.

Emmie, meanwhile, saw to the supper, and Tim was quite comfortable in the company of his wife's parents, talking familiarly with Sam Bollins about hats and hatters, and what Ganton was like forty years ago when you could see from where they were, past the station — there were no houses there then. . . . All that you see now are new. . . .

And Tim, as he listened, kept looking at his wife, who smiled and looked happy and seemed to hook him to her with those bright glances she shot at him from time to time. Tim would have put up with a society gathered from the hedges and ditches if only Emmie had been there to enjoy it, for her joyous spirit infected his.

Mr. Bollins, feeling very proud and happy, wiped his mouth and kissed his daughter.

"G'night, Emmie."

"Good night, Father."

Mrs. Bollins whispered: "Do you think Miss Booke was vexed?"

Emmie laughed.

"What does it matter if she was or not? This is my house, not hers."

Mrs. Bollins looked at her daughter with perplexity; Emmie was beyond her. . . .

CHAPTER XV

EMMIE in bed was a picture. The room was clean and tidy, the bed linen was white and Emmie, herself, with her hands specially attended to and her hair most carefully done and tied up with a dark red ribbon, was ready for any doctor.

Mrs. Bollins was there, useful in a way, but principally as an assistant to Mrs. Batten, the midwife, a portly, placid-faced woman, who had been present at the birth of the Holten and Grass children. She gave Emmie plenty of encouragement, told her she would go through it all right; she knew her sort; she'd seen them before . . . she'd be all right. And it would be a fine and healthy child. . . .

Mrs. Bollins was filled with pride. Every step she took in this house filled her with more pride. But, principally, she was struck with Emmie. Her own daughter seemed to be the most wonderful thing in the house. She was a perfect picture there, with her head on that pillow. Ill or well, she seemed to be the person in the house who counted. It was remarkable.

Tim, of course, was the master, but he was easy-going, he was tolerant, he would put up with things. With Emmie, now, you were stirred. Mrs. Bollins wondered why she had not noticed this before. Perhaps Emmie had changed . . . got more . . . more character.

But Emime could not dominate a little child. She turned and twisted and screwed up her handkerchief and thrust it into her mouth, while tears stood like jewels on her cheeks.

Dr. Everkith, exceedingly sympathetic, soothed her and helped her. . . .

A boy! . . .

Tim came to the bedside. He was cool and without fuss, but he looked at Emmie lovingly.

"Feel better?" he asked quietly.

She nodded and smiled.

"Don't worry to talk just yet," he whispered.

They both looked at the tiny infant on her breast.

Tim jerked his head in astonishment at the whole business. Emmie saw what was passing in his mind, and as their eyes met they smiled again.

Dr. Everkith patted him on the shoulder.

"Now then, Mr. Father, you'd better go a good walk or look after your business for a time, while your wife has a rest. She needs one!"

"I'll bet she does."

"Nobody will bet with you, Tim, so you can save your money. Now then, Mrs. Batten," said the doctor to the midwife, "you can clear these things away now," he signified some clothes, a kettle full of hot water, some dishes, etc., "and let Mrs. Tim have a nice sleep."

"Yes, Doctor."

Emmie slept and dreamt of wonderful things, and woke up to find a little bunched-up bit of humanity with fingers and toes which kept working, and a pair of eyes of a very deep blue which ignored everybody and everything for the moment, but made Emmie speculate extravagantly and wildly.

The birth of the little child made a difference to the Booke family as well as to the Timothy Booke, Junior, household. A boy — it had to be Timothy. It's grandfather and great aunts were delighted. Mr. Booke,

Senior, said very little, but he found many excuses for calling at Helston House — rather, he found one excuse very tempting.

"How's th' little 'un?" he would say, as he put his foot on the threshold, and a thrill went through him such as might go through deep waters. He was hugely delighted when little Timothy would catch at his knotty finger and hold it and then try to chew it and make little eloquent noises like "Euh. . . . Euh," and laugh.

"He's all right, Emmie."

"He's right enough," said Emmie proudly.

"Is he going to take after you or Tim? . . . Bit o' you both, I think."

"I think so. Best, too."

And Emmie herself was also thrilled by her child's ways. She wanted to press it to her more than to feel it; her emotion had to be slacked with some effort. She was enormously happy with it.

Then, though life settled again into its groove, it was a new groove, and had its everlasting air of surprise for Emmie.

Little Timothy was just an additional big thing in life and life seemed to have so many things that were big with emotion for Emmie.

She managed to do a good deal of housework, as well as attend to her child. Ada was some assistance and Tim suggested they should get in a more capable servant instead of Ada, but Emmie, feeling grateful in some way to Mrs. Bane, said No, she would get Mrs. Wright in two or three days a week. Ada consequently took little Tim out in the perambulator, and then Emmie would set about her cooking and cleaning with a zest that set the seal of ease on housewifery duties.

Emmie bathed the child every night, for Ada could not be trusted with delicate duties of that kind by an energetic and fond mother, and Tim would come and watch as Emmie, with dress tucked up, and apron in front of her cooed to a little baby in a bath, talked nonsense to it, make it occasionally chink with laughter, while Ada stood with mouth open, watching the scene with awe and admiration, and Tim, thrilled beyond accurate description, would occasionally kneel beside the bath, touch the little fingers and try to earn a rich laugh from his precious child.

"He's a bonny 'un," said Tim quietly to Emmie, as they knelt, one on each side of the bath.

"What did you expect?" said Emmie quickly.

Tim laughed.

"Heigh up!" said Emmie, as she arranged a warm towel across her knee. "Up-ise," she said, lifting the dripping child and kissing him as she wiped. And when he was glowing and dry and gurgling with the joy of it, Tim would try to see if those little fingers would catch his again and pinch little toes and make faces — and then kiss Emmie.

"You're a pair," he would whisper.

"You're not far out yourself."

And Ada would stand watching, as if she saw something strange and wonderful. . . .

Emmie and Tim were looking at their pride one night when the teeth were beginning to push their way through unwilling gums, when little Tim suddenly went blue and became rigid on his mother's knee.

Emmie gave a cry.

Tim said "Oh, God!"

"It's a fit," said Emmie wildly.

Tim said: "Do summat — Ada, run for the doctor — run! run! run! Dr. Everkith! Tell him to come at once; say baby's in a fit."

Ada started crying, but went.

"Hot water," said Emmie, and her voice was such as Tim had never heard it before. "The bath."

She was white with the shock, but somehow was working steadily at something reasonable. As fast as she could, she undressed the child, muttering all the while, "Baby darling! darling! Oh!"

She flung the clothes anywhere.

"Bath, Tim, quick; fill it with hot water. Look at him! Quick! Quick!"

Tim dashed about, got the bath, got a big can of boiling water and poured it in.

"Now some cold," said Emmie.

Tim brought it.

"Baby! Baby!" Emmie was too busy to cry. "It's a fit," she said; "hold him."

Tim took his little child, blue and stiff. He felt unsteady — as if he were in a dream almost.

Emmie pulled her sleeve up and dipped her elbow in the water to feel the temperature.

"Right, give him to me," she said.

She put little Tim in the water up to his armpits.

"Some cold water in his face, Tim."

Tim rushed away and was soon splashing gently some cold water in his son's horribly ashen face, which was now slightly less drawn and ghastly.

"He's getting better," said Emmie. "Get some castor oil."

She took the cold water from Tim, and while she held the little boy up with one hand in the warm bath, she flicked cold water on his face with the other hand.

When the doctor arrived little Tim was well again.

The father was still pale. The shock had been a grievous one to him.

"I thought he was gone," he said.

Emmie smiled and shook her head.

Dr. Everkith said she could not have done better if she had been a doctor, and wanted to know how she thought of it. Emmie said she supposed her mother must have mentioned fits to her — she thought Sarah had had convulsions.

But they were all impressed with Emmie's presence of mind and ability. It was her first child; she had never before seen a case of convulsions. Even Mrs. Holten said, in her impressive way: "You did very well, Emmie — very well, indeed. I congratulate you."

Miss Booke ventured: "I am glad to hear, Emmie, you kept your head; that was worthy of a Booke."

Emmie wanted to put her tongue out at that, but refrained.

Old Timothy quietly brought her a pearl and sapphire bracelet.

"Well done, Emmie!" he said. "I wouldn't have seen that child lost for a thousand pounds."

But Emmie herself really wondered why they all made such a fuss about it; she felt capable of doing things like that at any time, and she didn't lose her head in a crisis as easily as all that. . . .

But when she and Tim were alone that night looking at the little figure in the cot, they were both stirred to an emotion that was really too deep for expression.

The little child was sleeping with a tiny hand outstretched on the counterpane. Tim looked at Emmie.

"By Gum!" he said, shaking his head and letting tone and attitude say the rest.

Emmie surprised both herself and him by flinging her arms round his neck and crying.

Emmie's next little baby was a girl, christened Alice Emily. Emmie was up a week after the child was born, astonishing the Booke ladies considerably, for Mrs. Holten had not been so speedy a recoverer as that, and she was accounted tough.

Oddly enough, the Booke ladies were very pleasant to Emmie on account of her robustness. After all, as she was Tim's wife, it was really a good thing she was not an invalid.

They even went so far, at a propitious moment, to push her on a committee in connection with a Church Sewing Meeting with which they were connected. Mrs. Grass had suggested it. Miss Booke had wondered if it wouldn't turn Emmie's head, but Mrs. Holten made use of the now familiar phrase: "After all, she was Tim's wife — she was their niece"— and so Emmie was duly nominated to fill the vacancy and the Booke ladies behaved as if they had done something almost uncannily smart. They felt that few other families could have arranged the affair so neatly.

They had warned Emmie beforehand that they might do this great thing for her — warned her as solemnly as if they said they were inclined to think they could get a baronetcy for Tim and would do their best. Emmie wondered why all the fuss. . . . But Miss Booke was insistent. She ran over the names of the other members of the Committee (save three whose mention would nitrogenize the oxygenating effect of those cited) and then mentioned ladies who would be only too pleased to get on that Committee —"Be only too pleased, wouldn't they, Jane?"

Jane said shortly she should think so.

And Sophia, being further appealed to, said "most certainly," but encouraged Emmie to hope for the best.

And when the election had duly taken place and Emmie found she was amongst the chosen, she was plentifully informed how proud she ought to be and how grateful. Miss Booke mentioned the gratitude.

Emmie was a little moved. She felt she would meet Mrs. Tom This and Mrs. Dick That, Miss X and Mrs. Y — all important people in their way. It was generally termed "getting on," and Emmie liked it.

But as she had her hands pretty full at home now and Tim's friends were always very agreeable to her, she was beginning to feel she could afford to take things easily. She was, however, flattered after the first meeting of the Committee. Mrs. Holten and Miss Booke — both members — were most attentive to her. The rector's wife, Mrs. Sunning, a little, pleasant lady with energy for two and a tact that was generally breathless through trying to keep pace with it — was very affable and welcomed her agreeably, while other members were impressive in their various attitudes.

Emmie listened with interest and saw how Mrs. X or Miss Y had not a word to say, but just nodded acquiescence to the stronger members, such as Mrs. Holten or Miss Booke. And Emmie once thought of saying: "I don't agree with that. Why don't you do so and so?" but stopped herself in time. "What a fussy lot of things they are!" she muttered to herself. "I could have settled all that in about one quarter of the time."

And after the meeting, Mrs. Holten, having proposed a resolution, which had been seconded by Miss Booke before anybody else had a chance, walked home with the pride of one having achieved greatness.

Emmie was not a bit impressed with the things these ladies did in respect of their business, but was affected by the behaviour of one or two who spoke with sweet and low voices, suggesting delicacy and refinement.

The influence on Emmie of this was to give her more and more confidence in her comparatively new social stratum. It came to her turn to arrange for some light refreshments at a gathering of sewing ladies, visited at thrilling intervals during the evening, by the rector and the curate, the latter unmarried, and she managed so admirably that it was said no one had ever done better. As Emmie had cooked almost all the cakes herself, potted all the meat for the sandwiches and done it without feeling that she was being overworked, she was consequently surprised. "If they go into such a fuss over a little thing like that . . ." was her comment to herself.

Then when Emmie had been married six years, the big blow fell. She was opening a drawer in the dresser and does not know for what purpose, so completely did the shock knock everything else relating to that moment out of her head, when Jenks, a man in the planking shop, came running to the door. Emmie heard his dash at the yard gate and turned from the dresser to look through the window, wondering who was coming in that rather unceremonious way.

The man's ashen face, open mouth, and wrung eyes gave her warning. He looked about him in a haunted fashion.

"What's the matter?" thought Emmie, impersonally at first, and then with a realisation of something dreadful.

She opened the door.

"Eh! What's the matter?" she asked, but in the tone

of one sympathising with another, not fearing for herself.

Jenks hesitated.

"Eh . . ." he said. "Oh! Missis. . . ."

"What is it?" said Emmie quickly, feeling more drawn into the middle of some actuality. "What is it?"

"It's . . . er — th' mester!"

"Mes — oh!" she screamed. "What's the matter?" She took Jenks by the shoulder.

He apparently could not say what he had to say, for he just shook his head.

Emmie saw that something horrible was for her.

"Ah!"— she stifled the scream. "Not Mr. Tim, Jenks. . . . There hasn't been an accident?" She spoke quickly and at the top of her voice, as if the next note would swirl it in emotion. "Oh! where is he?" She turned to the gate.

"Mrs. Tim. . . . Missis! Missis! They're bringing him."

Jenks had found his tongue as he saw Mrs. Tim going into the factory.

Emmie was met, however, by Ernest Mullins. She saw a crowd of all sorts of people — men in shirt sleeves with aprons, no coats or vests, collars or ties, better dressed men in alpaca jackets and wearing aprons, a crowd of trimmers, and about the scene floated a babel of voices: "Now here. . . . Look up! . . . Get away, there. . . . Na then, Jim! . . . Get back, you others!" — and a steady groan accompanied it all.

"Go back," said Ernest Mullins to Emmie; "go back. Didn't someone tell you?" His face was white, and as he held up his hands to stop Emmie they trembled and shook.

"Oh! What is it?" said Emmie, her chin shaking as she gave little gasps.

"Come on in the house," said Ernest, as he took her by the arm. "It's best. It's — it's Mr. Tim. . . . There's been an accident —"

"Oh!" She turned round, but Ernest stood in front of her.

"You can do no good," he said.

"What! He's not dead!"

"He — he —"

Emmie threw his arm away and went swiftly forward. The crowd seemed to shrink on the edges, but in the middle it opened out.

"Missis Tim!" said a voice, "don't come now. Don't come here. You can do no good. Go in now, like a good woman —"

But Emmie stared wildly at a white and bloody form lying on the lid of a crate. She screamed. Women about were weeping and moaning.

"Is he . . . dead?" said Emmie, kneeling beside the body. "Tim . . . Tim . . . oh! oh! oh! oh! . . ."

Ernest Mullins's voice was heard telling the trimmers to go away, to go to their work — and the men, too.

"Let her be a bit."

He, too, was deeply moved.

CHAPTER XVI

NO one knew exactly how the accident happened. It probably came about in one of those inexplicable ways that the principal actors in the tragedies themselves cannot explain, even when they live.

Tim had gone into the engine room and had had a little chat with Brown, the Engineer, who said he saw nothing of what happened till he heard a cry and saw Mr. Tim caught in the straps.

Brown, almost stunned at the sight, had sufficient presence of mind to stop the engine. But Mr. Tim was a helpless mass when he was picked up — his back was broken and he died on the floor of his engine shed. When Emmie reached the body in the yard it was but her husband's corpse she met.

Emmie's groans were heartrending and the men just stood about in pathetic attitudes like the helpless tools of Fate. Mr. Bollins came out and comforted his daughter, and he and Mullins led her into the house.

Dr. Everkith came soon but said at once he could do nothing for Mr. Tim; he told Mrs. Tim she must bear up for the sake of the little ones, and felt that counsel to assuage grief was almost a superfluity.

The body was laid out in the spare bedroom and the police were notified.

Emmie could not keep away from the corpse at first. She could not feel it was real. An hour ago Tim was alive, walking about, having a thousand and one things dependent on his word and will: now he lay there, bruised and broken, never more to speak, to look, to hear, to be alive.

Dead! Emmie had never been close to death before. She had a faint remembrance of having gone to her grandmother's funeral but none of her own family had died and she had never been in a house with a corpse in it. Face to face with death she saw its horror. She would stare wildly at Tim's face, bruised on one side and cut, but placid looking, hideously placid — the placidity of death. It was terribly disturbing, torturing even.

Emmie sobbed in gushes. It was all so awful, so tragic, so hopeless . . . so agonisingly hopeless.

"Tim," she would murmur, and then shed her scalding tears.

But Tim did not respond as he had always done before at the sound of Emmie's voice.

The cruelty of death came home poignantly to Emmie as she sat by the bedside and called "Tim" to the Tim that would never hear her again. Never again — that was her wracking thought . . . still and silent for evermore. . . .

The blinds in the house were drawn and messengers were sent to the relatives.

The news spread through the town and dominated everything else.

"Tim Booke dead — killed. . . . My God! . . . Young Tim. . . . Hasn't been married more than about five or six year. . . . He's only thirty. . . . Tim Booke. . . ."

Ernest Mullins tried to comfort Emmie, but found how poor a thing sympathy was in actual words, when face to face with grim tragedy.

"Don't take on so." He was speaking from his own heart, for it hurt him to hear Emmie's outbursts of grief. But what a feeble kind of remark it was! He did not know what to do. He knew he would only stir

the wells of her sorrow if he praised Tim, and so at last he just ventured to pat her on the shoulder.

"We'll all do what we can to help you. Some of us can't do much, but . . . as for the works, don't you worry about that. . . . That will be all right!"

"Oh, Ernest," she moaned, "why did it happen? Why was he killed?"

Emmie's grief in a way wore itself out, for it was loosed afresh as each member of the family came.

Mr. Booke had least to say. His thin lips were pressed tightly, but they moved constantly. His face was agonisingly drawn. Emmie almost forgot her own grief in his. His mouth opened when he saw Emmie but he could not speak, and the trembling of his lips was acutely pathetic.

Emmie said, "Oh!" as she put her arms round his neck.

He nodded his head, but said nothing. He patted her feebly, very feebly on the back. It was almost as if he himself wanted some one to pat him. She took his arm, thrust a handkerchief to her mouth as the tears streamed down her face and led him to the room where Tim lay.

Timothy Booke's feelings had their greatest fight. He had suffered one or two severe blows in his life, but he had borne them with a fortitude that had been admirable and out of the common. He had never allowed his emotions to get the upper hand, and the love he had had for his son was the deepest thing in his life. He had given up hours upon hours as he sat smoking in his easy chair to building up young Tim's future. Not a word had he said to others. If his sister broke in on one of these building schemes with a, "What are you thinking about, Timothy?" he would answer, "Oh, nothing — nothing particular."

And now all the feelings he had that were tender seemed to be torn in ribbons.

He looked at Tim lying there and had a feeling kin to Emmie's. He was surely not dead . . . not *dead* . . . not gone for ever. . . . But he knew it was true. He put his hand on Tim's forehead, and the touch loosed Timothy Booke's floodgates.

He did not speak, but the tears streamed down his strong face. His mouth moved as if it were out of control. He groaned once.

Emmie sobbed, for his grief harmonized with her own. They stood together, shaking in their common sorrow.

"Oh! Isn't it cruel?" she said.

But he made no reply.

Mrs. Holten came in weeping and greatly distressed.

"Poor Tim!" she said. "Poor Tim . . . oh, Timothy! Emmie, it's awful." There was no make-believe in the grief.

Timothy now had ceased to weep. It was as if he had gone through the crisis and could now bear his lot. He looked haggard, as if something vital had gone out of him.

Miss Booke and Mrs. Grass came and were quickly followed by Mr. Holten and Mr. Grass, Mr. and Mrs. Bollins and Sarah.

The moaning was general. Emmie felt, too, the kindness of people, for every one sympathised with her. The Bookes in the midst of their sorrow did their best to comfort her. She was his widow. The bitter tongues were stayed completely with that still figure lying in the bedroom upstairs.

After the shock there was a concensus of praise for the dead man. "He was so gentle . . . so honourable . . .

so true . . . so kind . . . so sweet-tempered . . . so reliable."

The very mention of his virtues brought fresh tears to Emmie's eyes and to all the women.

"And the little children, too . . . orphans so soon."

"And he so fond of them!"

"Yes"— and then followed little tales of Tim's sayings and doings.

Friends kept calling to know if the news were really true, or to offer condolence.

Emmie had refused food: she wanted nothing. But she was prevailed on at last to eat, "for the children's sake." Emmie wept over them, till they looked at her wonderingly and asked why mummy cried.

Mr. Grass and Mr. Holten undertook to make all arrangements for the funeral so that Emmie need not be troubled at all.

Mrs. Bollins offered to sleep with Emmie and Mrs. Holten and Mrs. Grass said it would be very nice for Emmie to have her mother with her at a time like this.

And just before she went to bed, when all the visitors had gone, Emmie went to look at Tim once more. Mrs. Bollins crept behind her.

Emmie stood looking at her young husband, cut off in the very springtide of his life. A white sheet covered him, and Emmie turned it down to look at his face. The gas jet flared from the wall and shed a slightly yellow light. Immovable. . . . Never to stir again. . . . Never — that was the tragic word — never. . . . So young, too . . . a husband, a father, a friend, a man. . . .

Both Emmie and Mrs. Bollins wept as they stood there looking.

"It doesn't seem fair, Mother," sobbed Emmie.

"No. It's something hard to bear."

"But him, Mother . . . so young. . . . It's only like yesterday that we were walking out. . . . And he was only talking this morning of what he was going to do this wakes. . . ."

"We don't understand everything . . . we must just bear it."

"But it's him, Mother — Tim. . . . Him, so young, too."

"I think I'd come to bed now, Emmie: you were a good wife to him. He was very happy: that's one comfort."

Emmie kissed Tim's forehead, replaced the sheet, and left a flicker of gas burning.

The next day Emmie received numerous callers and letters of sympathy. Everybody spoke well of the dead man and a great stream of comfort flowed to the young widow and her children.

Ernest Mullins called and assured Emmie that she need not worry about the business: he would see that was not neglected.

Mr. Booke came again and was very quiet. He went to see the body and moved his head from side to side as if his blow was very hard to bear.

Mrs. Holten, Mrs. Grass and Miss Booke also came. They were full of sympathy and advice. They arranged for Emmie's mourning and helped so far as they could.

There was an inquest, but it was a formal affair and the verdict was "Accidental death," with an expression of sympathy for the family of the deceased.

As each day passed Emmie began to realise the facts more clearly. Tim was dead. She had no husband. She was a widow. The life that she had led as the wife

of Timothy Booke was at an end, and a new life had now begun, that as Mrs. Timothy Booke, widow, with two little children, aged respectively five and three. Things that had been done before by her husband would now have to be done by her: decisions he had made would now have to be made by her. She had no guide and companion now.

And what was her position?

Mr. Booke had whispered to her the day after Tim's death: "You needn't worry about the future, Emmie: that will be all right."

But Mr. Bowfield, Tim's solicitor, had said when he called: "I don't know if your husband has left another will — I shouldn't think so — but he made one three months after your marriage and he has left you everything."

Emmie had a vague idea that if a husband died the widow got everything and so took little notice of the information. Moreover, she had enough to occupy her without thinking strenuously of these things, even though she were occasionally disturbed by some chance remark or some casual thought concerning them.

The funeral was very impressive. It took place at Christ Church and from Helston House to the Church gates the blinds were down in almost all the houses as the sad procession passed.

Mr. Booke and Emmie went in the first carriage.

Mr. and Mrs. Bollins and Sarah were in the next and then followed the members of the Booke family and friends.

The tribute paid to Tim, the last it was possible to pay him, was remarkable in its genuineness and in its extent.

Sarah, looking through the window of the carriage, said: "It looks as if everybody were here!"

"I'm not surprised," said Mr. Bollins.

"No," echoed Mrs. Bollins, and she meant to convey a great deal by that.

And after a pause Sarah said, "And to think it's our Emmie."

"Ay," said Mr. Bollins.

"Yes," echoed Mrs. Bollins.

At the Church gate when the carriages stopped, Emmie shook and burst into fresh tears. This was the threshold of the end. Now she was about to part with Tim forever: this was the last stage. Mr. Booke put a hand on her arm, but found it very difficult to say anything. He had reached a stage in life when the clouds do not disperse quickly. The sun might shine again for Emmie but not for him.

Emmie nestled to him as she wept.

"It's the end," she gasped.

"Ay," said Timothy.

There was a crowd round the gate, men, women and children, but mostly women. Some of them were well dressed, they were there out of a feeling of kinship with humanity that suffered. Many were simply curious. A great number of the women were trimmers. All Booke's were there and the whole route traversed by the hearse and cortège had its stand of watchers.

As Mr. Booke and Emmie got out of the carriage, the tongues wagged. "That's Mr. Booke. . . . His father. . . . Isn't he aged? He's ten years older. . . . He's a broken man. . . . That's his wife. . . . She's pretty, isn't she? . . . She was Emmie Bollins — used to trim at th' Booke's. . . . She is pretty. . . . She's got some

good clothes on. . . . She'll feel it. . . . He was a nice chap was Mr. Tim. . . . Here's her father and mother — that's Mr. and Mrs. Bollins — he works at Booke's. And that's her sister: she trims at Spencer's. That's Mrs. Holten — Timothy Booke's sister. . . . It is. . . . It isn't. . . ."

There was quite a crush at the gate, so eager were the sightseers to see what was going on.

The coffin was carried by men from the works.

Mr. Booke and Emmie followed. All the mourners were in deep black and Mr. Booke had a thick black mourning band round his silk hat. Emmie wore a long crepe veil.

Mr. Sunning accompanied by his curate, the Rev. John O'Kelly, stood waiting for the procession to get in order.

Mr. Samuel Orde, who had charge of the funeral arrangements, was handing out wreaths. The coffin was covered with them, and the effect of the floral tributes was very moving amongst the people. Women cried as the flowers were put on the coffin, and carried by the men from the works: there seemed to be some emotional power in these frail beautiful things. The women who wept as they saw them were probably incapable of saying precisely why they wept.

The Rev. Mr. Sunning, receiving a nod from Mr. Orde to tell him that all was ready, repeated: "'I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord.'"

The tones and the words flung a new note into the ceremonial for many. The religious heard it with comfort: this death was but the gate of life . . . "whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

Mr. Booke and Emmie did not hear to understand. This was the last formula for them. They caught mere glimpses of phrases. . . . "'For man walketh in a vain

shadow and disquieteth himself in vain: he heapeth up riches and cannot tell who shall gather them.'"

The words of the Burial Service were a balm and a healing for some. They saw light in the darkness and hope in the gloom. But the words: "We therefore commit his body to the ground: earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust" had but the grim reality for Mr. Booke and Emmie at least amongst the mourners

"Ashes to ashes . . . dust to dust." . . . That was the end.

Mr. Booke stood without moving, having the air of one numbed with the blow.

Emmie was weeping.

Mr. Holten took Emmie's arm as Mrs. Holten took Timothy's. They drove back to Helston House. There the friends and relatives talked of many things. Some were reminded of the death of the Duke of Clarence, who had died that year: others mentioned Spurgeon . . . ministers and clergy were discussed . . . and business.

Emmie was told to lie down and rest.

There was an excellent tea provided: cold meats, of course, but those of the best and in many varieties. The friends left first.

Miss Booke said to Mrs. Grass: "I suppose Emmie will be comfortably off: she'll have a living in any case. I suppose Timothy will go on with the works."

Mrs. Grass shook her head.

"From what Timothy said to Fred, I understand the works are Emmie's."

Miss Booke looked very surprised.

"What!" she exclaimed, "Emmie's . . . the works. . . . In a sense, but she'll have to do what Timothy says."

Mrs. Grass shook her head.

"I don't understand it all, but I think Emmie can do what she likes — they are hers: it's all hers."

Miss Booke went to Mrs. Holten to beg for confirmation. Mrs. Holten apparently had just learnt the truth.

"You see Timothy gave the works and the house to Tim: well, Tim made a will and left everything to Emmie."

"Oh, but —"

"She could sell the works if she wanted," said Mrs. Holten.

"Sell: but we must have no nonsense of that kind. Emmie's not going to do as she likes. Where's Mr. Bowfield?"

But Mr. Bowfield explained to Mrs. Holten and to Miss Booke that Emmie's property was her own to do as she liked with.

The Booke ladies sought their husbands and talked the matter over, getting no further forwards towards what they desired but gathering confirmation of their fears.

When Emmie came down, looking very well in crêpe, though pale with the ordeal, Miss Booke said: "I suppose, Emmie, now you'll be glad if Mr. Booke looks after the business again."

"I don't know," said Emmie, with a weary air, as if she did not wish to be bothered with business at this time.

Miss Booke hesitated. After all, the time was not quite one for the discussion of affairs. But Booke & Son . . . those works.

"Of course," said Miss Booke, "you can't be troubled now: but we must find some way of seeing that the business goes on. I hear Tim has left you everything."

Emmie nodded.

Mrs. Holten, trying to be discreet, was observant and attentive. She said tactfully: "We shall help you all

we can, Emmie: and if Timothy will manage the works again it will relieve it, won't it?"

"I don't know," replied Emmie.

Miss Booke drew herself up.

Mrs. Holten pressed her lips together.

Then the children, who had just been brought from the Grass's, came in, and rushed to their mother, who seized them emotionally to cry over them.

"I know what's the matter," said Tim; "daddy's dead."

Emmie bit her lip and pulled the boy to her.

"I want daddy, mammy —"

"Me, too," said Alice. "Baby want daddy. . . . Where daddy?"

Mr. Holten suggested to his wife they had better go: they were only tiring Emmie now and could do nothing more to help her.

Mr. Booke said as he was going out: "I'll come and see how you're going on, Emmie. And there's th' shop, too: we can have a talk about it."

"Come when you like," she said, "the oftener the better."

He bent down his head and went away.

Sarah stayed with Emmie on the night of the funeral.

"That Miss Booke's a stuck-up thing," she said. "What's this, Emmie — is the shop yours?" By "shop" she meant the factory.

Emmie nodded.

"What — your own? Are you the boss? Could you sack anybody if you wanted?"

Emmie was silent for a moment. The phrase had suddenly given her a vision of power. "Sack anybody if she wanted." . . . Of course. . . . Yet she had not thought of that. She owned "T. Booke & Son." . . .

It was hers. This was like a dream, a fairy story. She, who once was a trimmer, to own the place.

And then she suddenly gave a gasp and burst into tears.

Sarah went to her.

"What is it? Don't fret so, Emmie."

"I'd rather be a trimmer again and have Tim," she managed to say between her sobs.

"You mustn't keep thinking of things like that," said Sarah. "You've two children — and them works to think of."

As Emmie took off the crêpe bodice, with its inflated sleeves at the shoulders, she said to herself — "those works to think of."

She held out her bodice and looked at it.

Sarah said: "Sleeves are going bigger, they say."

"They're big enough," said Emmie.

"I suppose all this is yours now, Emmie." Sarah was looking at the furniture.

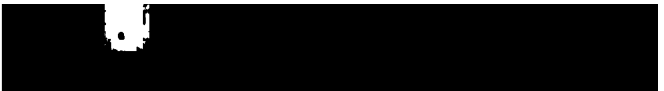
Emmie followed Sarah's regard. But she looked at the bed. . . . That was where Tim had slept.

She gasped and fought with her tears.

"Get into bed," said Sarah. "You mustn't go on fretting like that."

Emmie said to herself: "Oh! what a funny thing life is!"

PART THREE:
THE EVERLASTING WOMAN



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CHAPTER XVII

EMMIE at her rising (and in fact at breakfast, at dinner and almost at every other moment) was reminded of her loss. She kept seeing Tim in some accustomed attitude, smiling at her, making some remark, catching hold of her. . . . It was very trying to her feelings. How people lived on after death! And lived, too, just as they had behaved in life. . . . It was by their deeds they were remembered. Tim's smiles and jokes and comfortable speech were just the things that came to Emmie now. And yet how hopeless, how utterly irrevocable it all was! . . . How memories haunted one!

Sarah had to go to work and just before she left, Emmie said: "I wish you'd call on Mr. Bowfield and ask him if he'd mind coming to see me. I'd like to understand my position properly, and I didn't pay enough attention to him yesterday."

"Yes," said Sarah, "I'll call as I pass."

She was enjoying her breakfast with Emmie, for it was really luxurious to sit down in this spacious kitchen where everything was bright and clean and substantial, and there seemed an almost unlimited supply of crockery and cutlery, and the table-linen was so white, and the table, even for breakfast, was set all over and not merely at one corner, with the rest of it covered with hat trimmings, paste, scissors and an almost indescribable litter such as she was regularly accustomed to at home.

She thought of Emmie's position. This was hers. She could do what she wanted in this big house.

"Eh, Emmie," she said, stirred by her thoughts.

"What?" asked Emmie.

"Nothing. Well, I was just thinking. Of course, Mr. Bowfield'll tell you . . . but if this is all yours . . . and the shop! Eh! . . ."

"We'll soon find out," said Emmie, quickly.

"If it is so, and I expect it is," said Sarah, "what will you do?"

"Do?"

"Yes. What will you do? You can't manage a works."

"You don't suppose I shall give 'em away, do you?" Sarah smiled.

"No, but what will you do?"

"Something. I'll see," said Emmie.

Then little Tim wanted something from Auntie Sarah, and Alice was coaxed by her mother to finish her bread and milk.

"Tim going to school to-day?" Sarah asked.

"Yes," said Emmie, "he'll be better there."

But Tim said he didn't want to go, he wanted a holiday, and Emmie realised how that before, when she had wished to persuade him to do something, she had threatened to "tell Daddy." She knew it was mean and cowardly holding up the father as a mere punitive being, while she tried to snatch all the affection she could, but almost all women did it. She saw, however, she would have to be decided and purposeful in her dealings with the children now. They would owe their training to her. This tiny revolt of Tim's could not be handed over to some one else to deal with, while she came in like a camp follower for the subsequent kisses of comfort.

"No, Tim — school to-day."

"But I don't want, mammy. I don't want —"

Emmie screwed up her resolution. Sarah wanted to say, "Oh, let him stay to-day, poor little orphan!"

"You've had a little holiday, Tim dear: you must go to-day. . . . Daddy would have liked it."

Tim looked awed.

"How do you know daddy would have liked it, mammy?"

"I do, darling."

"How?"

"Because daddy said so."

"When?"

"He always said so, darling."

"When?"

Emmie's chin began to shake.

Sarah said: "Now be a good boy, Tim, and don't make mammy cry."

Tim looked at his mother. He appeared to be greatly perplexed.

"Mammy," he said, quietly, stroking her face, "when did daddy say that?"

"Always, darling," said Emmie.

"Always. . . . Was he always saying he liked me to go to school? What did he say, mammy?"

"I can't remember the exact words, darling, but you know he did want you to go regularly and you always will, won't you?"

Tim nodded his head thoughtfully.

"I wonder why Daddy wanted me to go to school," he said, as if the problem troubled him.

Alice said: "Mammy!"

"Well, darling?"

"Did Daddy want baby to go, too?"

Emmie pressed the child to her: her emotions were stirred.

"Yes, dear — when you are old enough."

"When baby old enough," repeated Alice, gathering some of her bread and milk off the tablecloth with her spoon.

"Well, I must be off," said Sarah. "Shall I come to-night?"

"If you like. Yes, come. It will be company."

Ada took Tim to school, one kept by two young ladies, and had Alice also with her.

Mrs. Wright came in to help, for Emmie found she had plenty to do just now. The fact that she was plentifully occupied was, too, a safety valve for her grieving. She had to take her mind off her loss and was consequently better able to bear the pangs when sorrow came to her on the wings of association and recollection.

Mr. Bowfield was a comparatively young man. He had been a friend of Tim's and knew exactly what Tim had wished to do. He was pleasant-faced, reliable looking, with a comforting professional manner.

"Well, Mrs. Tim, I expect you'd like to know exactly how you stand," he said, as he sat in the dining-room with Emmie.

The blinds were up now: not to the top, for that would have looked as if they were rather too eager to be normal the moment the body had left the house. Mrs. Wright said — to herself —"I'll pull 'em up half way. It won't be so melancholy and it'll be feelin'."

"Yes," said Emmie, in reply to the lawyer. She had thrown off her apron and received Mr. Bowfield dressed in a black stuff skirt and black cotton blouse, which blended almost mournfully with her thick black hair and

black brows. Her brown eyes were very brown and bright.

"Well, as I hinted to you — everything Tim possessed is yours. It's very nice, you know, that is, Mrs. Tim, for it shows he . . . well he appreciated you."

Emmie's eyes twitched and her mouth was only with difficulty kept under control.

"Yes," said Bowfield. "He made his will after he was married, so he knew what he was doing."

Emmie nodded. She was feeling a person of importance, discussing business with a solicitor. She had never had to deal direct on matters of business before and the situation moved her a little. But as Mr. Bowfield emphasised the figure of Tim, she was moved in another direction.

He went on: "I may as well tell you that Tim made his will especially to make things easy for you. I told him that if he died without a will, you wouldn't suffer; but he said he'd make things sure."

Emmie nodded. How good had Tim been to her! He had cared for her. And he had been happy, too.

She said after a pause: "Well, what is my position? Tim's left me what he had. I've the two children to bring up. What have I got to bring them up on?"

"So far as I can make out, you've got a business, a row of cottages off Hyde Road that bring in about — say net £150. There are some shares, £500, in a Spinning Company — and that's all I can find."

"What does that make?" asked Emmie. "About £150 and that interest — and the works."

"That's it: say £170 and the works."

"Have you any idea what the works bring in?"

"Well, Tim did say once to me he'd made a clear profit of £1,500."

"Fifteen hundred pounds — how much is that a week?"

"Thirty."

"Thirty pounds a week." Emmie understood her income clearly. She had been overjoyed on those occasions in the past when she had earned thirty shillings a week, and here she was comfortably assured of thirty pounds. She was astonished. She had never known what Tim's income was. She had been afraid to ask lest Tim should think she was considering his money too much.

"Of course," said Mr. Bowfield, "I can't guarantee those figures. That was one year, and it may have been a good year or a bad one, but I shouldn't think it was extra good — or bad. T. Booke & Son have got a good connection, you know."

"Yes."

He paused.

Emmie was thinking. "Thirty pounds a week!"

"I shall be very glad to act for you, Mrs. Tim, as I did for Tim."

"That's all right," said Emmie. "I hope I shan't have much for you, but what I have — I suppose you acted for the business, too?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's all right — so long as it is all right," she said with a smile.

He smiled, too. He respected her frankness.

"I'll see it's all right," he said. He was beginning to think that Tim had chosen very well when he married: Mrs. Tim was no fool.

"Who collects the rents of those cottages?" she asked. "Aren't they in Gore Street?"

"Yes. I think Tim used to go himself, or send some-

body. I got them last Monday, so that they shouldn't be overlooked, and if you like I'll go on collecting them."

Emmie was silent a moment.

"I suppose you'd charge for it?"

"Just the usual commission, and I'd see to all the repairs and lettings."

"H'm . . . I think I can do it, thanks. It will mean going round on a Monday morning."

Bowfield was saying to himself: "And some of them tried to sneer at Tim's wife. . . . I'd like 'em to have a deal with her."

"You can send one of your men."

Emmie nodded. "Send one of your men!" The very phrase was grandiose. "Send one of your men!" Her father and mother lived in that little cottage in Silton Street, and she had been a trimmer and worn clogs. Now it was, "send one of your men!"

Her bosom heaved. She liked talking business with the lawyer. A little colour had come into her cheeks and there was a fine vivacity in her eyes.

"The works are yours, too, Mrs. Tim," he said.

"Yes. . . . I'd like to know exactly what that means."

"It means that you can shut them up to-morrow if you want. You can work them, sell them — do what you like with them. They're yours — lock, stock and barrel, bricks and mortar, machinery, engines — everything."

Emmie nodded understanding. Everything . . . hers . . . to work or sell. . . . It was colossal.

"I don't know if you've made up your mind what to do," he said. "Haven't had time, perhaps. . . ."

"N-no."

"You could probably turn them into a Company. You might get twenty thousand, though perhaps fifteen or

sixteen would be nearer the mark. There's money still made out of hats, but people won't sink money in hatting just now . . . very cut the trade is."

"And Tim made fifteen hundred pounds."

"Yes, that's true. Of course, you'll get the exact figures from the books. Tim had a manager — Ernest Mullins: he's reliable, I think."

"Yes. . . ."

There was a pause.

Mr. Bowfield rose.

"I don't know if there's anything else, Mrs. Tim. I am always at your service, you know. Anything I can do in the way of help or advice — quite outside business, *my* business — I shall only be too glad to do. Tim was a friend of mine."

Emmie swallowed.

"Thanks. . . . You're very good. Just for the moment I'm taking stock. I'm very much obliged, Mr. Bowfield. Come out this way," and she showed him out by the front door.

She went back into the dining-room and stood there as if she would quietly assimilate what she had learnt. The business of T. Booke & Son, everything about it, bricks and mortar, machinery, materials, et cetera, et cetera, were hers . . . hers. . . .

She sat down. She realised her position in a wave of emotion. It was something disturbing for her to be suddenly given power like this. To own a hat works. . . . She knew nothing like it. She supposed that if a hat manufacturer had died before he had always had a son old enough to carry on the business.

Of course she could sell. . . . Sell? . . . Tim's works . . . T. Booke & Son's. . . . No! No! There was the little Tim coming on. Yes, there was a Timothy

Booke growing up who must some day inherit those works. So they must be kept going —

Mrs. Wright came to the door.

"There's Mester Mullins 'ere."

"Oh! Show him in."

Ernest came in wearing a black alpaca jacket and a black apron. His black tie was a cheap one but his linen seemed fairly clean. He had generally a neat and tidy air. He was a light complexioned, capable looking man, of no particular distinction in his appearance, but interesting to the discerning. His nose was broad and not small though it could not be glibly described by any of the recognised shapes; his mouth was full and covered with a sandy moustache; his jaw was assuringly good and his brow was inclined both to be broad and high, while his blue eyes had a steady reliable look.

"Come in, Ernest," said Emmie. "Sit down. I've just had Mr. Bowfield here."

"Oh! . . . I thought I'd just come and see how you were and if you wanted anything from me."

Emmie pushed the hairpins more securely in her hair.

"Well," she said a little hesitatingly, "we'd better have a talk on business."

"Yes."

"T. Booke & Son belongs to me." She felt stirred a little as she said it, and a faint blush stole into her cheek. It was almost like a boast and Emmie did not mean to speak in that light, though she thoroughly understood the importance of the remark.

"I gathered as much. . . . I don't understand it altogether: is it yours absolutely? Or have you only a sort of share, a life interest in it? Have you to go whack with the children?"

"No." She spoke quickly. "It's mine." She re-

peated Bowfield's words as if she liked them, "lock, stock and barrel, bricks and mortar, machinery, engines — everything."

There was a tremendous satisfaction on her face.

"H'm." He was wondering what was going to happen.

"Of course, naturally, what's mine is the children's — you know what I mean?"

"Yes."

"But it's mine to do as I like with. Tim has left everything to me, and I can shut it up to-morrow if I want —"

"But you'll not do that," he said quickly.

"No fear."

The quick, almost supplication from Ernest pleased her. "You'll not do that?" . . . There was clear evidence of power.

She shook her head. "Why should I?"

"There wouldn't be much sense in that," he said, quickly.

"Of course not. I haven't made up my mind what to do yet — except that things must go on. I was wondering. . . . You can manage, Ernest, can't you?"

"Manage the place properly, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Yes. Of course I have in a sense been managing it since Mr. Booke left it — in a sense that is. Mr. Tim decided anything, but he left a lot to me. He was away a good deal for one thing."

"Suppose," said Emmie, "I made you manager: made you responsible — could you do it?"

"Yes, and be very glad to, both for Tim's sake and yours."

"H'm. . . . Of course, I don't want to decide in a

hurry. We must have a talk, but at any rate you go on acting as if you were manager. I make you manager let's say for a month at — what do you get, Ernest?"

"Three pound, ten."

"Three pound, ten. . . . Might make it five pounds — that'll do for this month at any rate."

"Thanks. Yes. . . . Er —"

"Just go on managing it to the best of your ability. Do your very best. At the end of the month we might come to better terms — we'll see: say perhaps a bit of commission on the profits, eh?"

"I think that would be fair."

"I'll be fair with you. But I want you to let me know what the profits have been for the last seven or eight years — you could let me have that, couldn't you?"

"Yes."

Ernest was by now almost in the attitude of one who waited for orders, who recognised a superior. He had come in with the full determination to help Emmie to the best of his ability: he felt sorry for her. He saw her as a young widow with two young children to bring up and a big business on her hands. He was prepared to do his utmost for her for sentimental reasons quite apart from those of personal advantage, though he naturally quite realised that the position of authoritative manager with full responsibility and power was a better post than the one he had occupied hitherto.

And when he had come in he had come prepared to talk sympathetically to Emmie, to tell her not to worry about anything, and he had expected to find her in a dejected and appealing frame of mind. He was a little anxious about his position but his uppermost feelings were those of guide, counsellor and friend. He was astonished at Emmie's attitude. She was so clear-headed. There

was no nonsense about her. She knew what she wanted to know and wasted no sighs or phrases in silly remarks or, as he called it to himself afterwards, flapdoodle. He sat like a servant, and she spoke like the mistress.

"There's another thing," said Emmie.

"Yes." He spoke as one receiving orders.

"I'll walk round with you one of these days: but not yet. Only, in the meanwhile, let me know what you're doing, when you buy anything, for instance."

"What er—"

"Wool, fur, silk, band and binding. . . . I might just as well try to understand the business. Just bring me in bits of samples and you can tell me if it's cheap or what."

He nodded. "Yes, I understand," he said.

"You can let them know how things stand."

"I must have some authority," he said. "They're all working well, but there's always one or two ready to take liberties."

"Oh! Sack any of that sort. Don't have any nonsense, Ernest. Are you busy now?"

"Fair. Got a big order in this morning from Ogden & Fry."

"Who are they?"

"A big firm in London: they're wholesale people and can give us an order for five hundred dozen now and again."

"That's big. What's this for?"

"About a hundred and twenty dozen altogether."

"Oh! . . . Well, just pop in before you go to-night."

"Right. I suppose we'd better get out a circular to send to customers and those in the trade, that Mr. Tim's dead and that the business will be carried on by his widow and er . . . I suppose I'd better say Mr. Ernest Mullins has been appointed manager, eh? And there's

the signing of cheques. . . . Shall I sign? I shall want your authority."

"Oh! . . ." Emmie considered. There were evidently lots of things she had not thought of. "Could I sign?" she asked.

"You could. It wouldn't always be convenient. Suppose you were away?"

"I shouldn't have to go away," she said quickly. She had not been in the habit of going away much and so that was no drawback or difficulty.

"In any case it would mean fetching you to the office," said Ernest.

"Well. . . . If I didn't sign I suppose you would?"

"Yes. Nobody else of course."

"H'm. . . . Suppose we both did it — could that be arranged?"

"Ye-es."

"Well, when you come in to-night, bring in a copy of the circular and I'll read it over."

"Right! By Gum! Mrs. Tim, but you've got a head on your shoulders!"

"I should look funny if I hadn't," she said quickly.

But when Ernest went back into the works he carried with him a picture that was like nothing of Emmie he had seen before, except the frame. "Talking like that, as clear-headed as you please. . . . And she, knocked over with the death of her husband. . . . Only about twenty-five or twenty-six — something like that. . . . And a bonny looking woman too, fine figure. . . . Imagine her signing cheques."

Clearly Ernest was very much impressed.

Emmie, too, was impressed, but differently. She was impressed by circumstances.

These works were hers — that was the idea she was driving home. They were her property just as much as the furniture in the house was hers, as that chair on which she sat. She knew, of course, what to do with the chair, but it was not so easy to say what must be done with a hat factory. She tingled with the realisation of what her possessions actually were. A hat factory, with boilers and dye-kettles, and machinery; plankers and fur blowers and wool formers and body makers and finishers and trimmers and . . .

She wept. She thought of Tim again. The extent of her heritage thrust her mind to the cause of it. Tim, lying in the ground. . . .

Mrs. Wright appeared at the doorway.

"'Ad I better do th' potatoes?" she asked.

Emmie wiped her eyes and stood.

"Yes. . . . The pudding ought to be in too. Is the oven hot?"

"Fair."

Emmie went briskly to the kitchen.

"The potatoes," she said, and turned to go down the cellar.

"Eh! I'll fetch 'em, Mrs. Tim," said Mrs. Wright, making a heavy movement forward and speaking with more compunction than desire.

Emmie skipped down the cellar steps.

"Just stir that fire!" she called out, "and pull the damper."

She came up smartly with some potatoes in a basket and a big jug of milk.

"I'd ha' fetched 'em, Mrs. Tim," said Mrs. Wright. "You shouldn't . . ."

"In five minutes," thought Emmie. She merely said:

"There are the potatoes — I should think half a dozen of those would be ample."

She turned to the fire, raked it and pushed some under the oven, the door of which she felt with the back of her hand.

"It's all right," she said.

While Mrs. Wright was slowly making up her mind that she had to peel potatoes and that to peel potatoes she must have a knife and then she must take a potato in one hand and a knife in the other, Emmie put milk, rice, sugar, a pinch of salt and some nutmeg in a dish, placed the dish in the oven, went into the cellar again for the meat and the two women found themselves going to the knife box at the same time.

Emmie worked well, and, as long as her mind was occupied with some task or other, she did not mourn. But she found so often that little "something" to recall Tim. She might be dusting and lift a tobacco jar, tidying upstairs and see a shaving brush or a razor, and everything was forgotten but the dead man and what he had meant to her. At such moments she was too moved to do more than dwell on the picture and grieve.

She was also stirred by the many kind messages that came. The secretary of the Gentleman's Club wrote to express the sympathy and condolence of the members; the secretary of a cricket club did the same, also the secretary of the political club, also many individuals. Emmie received over a score of letters from people she did not know at all intimately. They all testified to the respect and esteem, and, in many cases, affection in which Tim had been held.

While Emmie was of course very pleased to receive these letters, she was disturbed in spirit because of them.

They all reminded her of her loss and made her weep fresh tears.

But surely she began to take stock of her legacy. Those works . . . that was the item that fired her imagination and made her realise she would have need of all her resolution and decision in dealing with it. A factory where hundreds of men and women earned their living. . . .

As Emmie rested for a moment from her housework, she began to see T. Booke & Son as something extraordinarily fascinating. She was merely dazed with the possession at first. The factory — hers. . . .

Afterwards her keen, practical mind faced the situation. She did not know she had a particularly keen or especially practical mind, though she knew she was capable of dealing competently with the ordinary affairs of life. She knew very well, for instance, that she could not manage a hat factory, but she was beginning to realise that it might be within her ability to find a man to manage the business and for her to manage him!

Also, for that matter, she could let Mr. Booke manage the works again . . . perhaps he would. He seemed to hint at it, or one of them had. The works had to be kept going because of the money they brought in, and because of little Tim, who must one day inherit and carry them on, so some one must manage them . . . whoever it was . . .

But Emmie felt "T. Booke & Son" a tough proposition, something that might worry her considerably. As she went about her duties in the house, cooked the dinner, dusted, saw to the children, dealt with the heavy correspondence that poured in on her at this time, etc., etc., she kept seeing "T. Booke & Son" as a problem to be solved.

Mr. Booke called. He was in black and looked like a man who had been hard hit: but he had fortitude and could bear the ills of life with little or no public grieving.

Emmie no sooner saw him than she thought of Tim. The father suggested the son in so many ways. He came into the kitchen as Emmie was laying the cloth for dinner. Little Tim had not come back from school, but Alice was at home and ran eagerly to her grandpa, who sat down and took her on his knee and let her play with his watch.

"She's growin', Emmie," he said.

"Yes."

"Goin' to be like you, too."

"Is she?"

"Yes. Has Bowfield been to see you?"

"Yes."

"Oh. . . . I suppose you know now exactly how things are."

"Yes. . . . It's the works, of course, that are the trying thing."

"H'm. Still, we must get over that. I'll see they're not played ducks and drakes with — if you want —" He paused.

Emmie said quietly after the pause, "I've been talking to Ernest."

"Oh! . . . He's all right, you know. I should think he'd do with somebody behind him: he shouldn't think he'd got a soft job on. . . . But I always reckoned him capable and he did very well for Tim."

"That's what I was thinking," said Emmie. "I'm going to have a talk with him to-night. I've told him to get some figures for me, and he's drawing up a circular to send to customers and others."

Mr. Booke nodded and looked at Emmie keenly. He had always known she was no fool, but she did not assume

the attitude of the broken woman now, helpless and yearning for support: she talked like a sensible being taking sensible stock of affairs.

"Baby got 'nother puff-puff," said Alice to her grandpa.

"Oh! An' who gave Baby another puff-puff?"

"Auntie Sophy. . . . Booful puff-puff." Alice climbed down from her grandfather's knees to fetch the booful puff-puff.

"Of course you'll do as you like, Emmie," said Mr. Booke. "The works are yours. T. Booke & Son belongs to you." He paused a moment, as if the reflection was of more than passing interest and importance. "But we shouldn't like to see the place go down — any of us. I thought I'd done with business, but if you like I'll shoulder the harness again."

"Now don't you worry for the moment, Grandpa. I don't know what's best at present, but you've earned your rest."

"Nay, I'm not that old. At least I should hope not. I've plenty o' work in me yet, and if it's for T. Booke & Son I'm ready to go till I drop."

"Yes, I know, but . . . of course it's very kind of you. Let's wait a bit. Perhaps Ernest can manage, and you can help me to keep an eye on him."

"They're yours, as I said," he replied. "T. Booke & Son belongs to you. I don't want to push myself —"

"Pushing yourself — you're not pushing yourself," said Emmie. "You know I'm very grateful, Grandpa, but I don't want to drag you back to work now for me. I'm not that helpless."

"No . . . you're not that helpless." He said it very quietly, and obviously was paying her a compliment, though as he was not used to the giving of praise he did

it rather oddly. "Of course," he added, "I can't help taking an interest in . . . T. Booke & Son."

"Well, of course not. But what do you think, Grandpa; could I manage with Ernest as manager?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You might. . . . He might do very well for you."

Emmie watched him closely. "He isn't satisfied," she said to herself, but she was now beginning to experience a desire that seemed to be growing fast — to have and keep these works under her control. She was attracted by the sense of something exhilarating and most fascinating. A jewel rich and rare and of great price would have had no attraction for her comparable to this. T. Booke & Son . . . her's — that was the refrain.

"Yes," she said, "and I can always come to you for advice."

He nodded.

"I shouldn't like T. Booke & Son to go down," he said quietly.

He got up. Alice came in with the new toy.

"Booful puff-puff, Gran'pa. See." She put it on the ground and dragged it. "Puff . . . puff . . ."

Emmie watched her and bit her lip; the child seemed oblivious of all the big things that were going on and being decided around her.

"Fine puff-puff," said Mr. Booke, who was not capable of sinking to a child's level with zest. "Well, I'll be off."

"Would you like to stay and have some dinner?" Emmie said. "It's not much — a stew, but it's all right."

"No, no. I've got mine waiting. Mornin'."

"Good morning," said Emmie. "Come in often."

He nodded slightly, bent down and kissed Alice.

T. Booke & Son. . . . They did think something of it. Emmie sat in a chair when Mr. Booke had gone and dwelt on the situation. Grandpa was very good to offer to look after the works. . . . Perhaps it might be best. If the business went down the Bookes would never forgive her. But Ernest Mullins could manage. . . . They'd have to put somebody in to manage . . . except, of course, Mr. Booke went back himself. And he'd do that before he'd see those works come short of a certain standard.

What should she do? Emmie sat and pondered and was a little troubled. The responsibility was great: so also was the attraction. To be the head of a hat works . . . it was almost dizzying. Suppose she were taken advantage of — tricked — and the business ruined. She trembled at the thought of that.

Then little Tim came dashing in from school.

"I was second in class in sums to-day, Mammy, and I should have been first only Arthur Fore spoke before I did, and Miss Ada said I did very well."

Emmie kissed him. "Splendid! You'll be first soon. Now take your hat off; we'll have dinner in a minute."

Tim sniffed. "What is it? Stew . . . I like stew. And, Mammy, can I have a new satchel, because my other's all torn? And we're going to do singing this afternoon. I like singing; do you like singing, Mammy?"

Alice came along.

"Puff, puff, puff, puff. Mammy, when I doe to stool tan I take my puff-puff with me?"

"We'll see, darling. We'll have dinner now."

Emmie washed herself and put on her crêpe dress, in the afternoon. She looked at herself as she washed. Well, nobody could say she hadn't a good figure. . . .

That face was all right too, and a widow . . . a widow at her age!

She had to bite her lip and swallow, and then failed to keep back the tear. It was hard. She was young yet, with life before her.

Emmie was finely healthy and full of vitality, and the solitariness suggested by this big bedroom chilled her.

But she might have been left badly off — that would have made things hard. As it was — and then she was back at that haunting idea symbolised as it were by a big factory chimney with a lightning conductor running alongside it: T. Booke and Son. . . .

The heavy black of the dress displeased her. She liked her thick black hair and dark eyebrows, but she felt very black in this crêpe. A jabot of white lace would relieve it — what was she thinking of? She was in black for Tim. . . . Poor Tim! She saw him walking about the room, turning round and saying, "Oh, Emmie," or coming to her when she was half dressed and teasing her.

Now he was dead. Dead . . . it was almost incomprehensible.

She wiped her eyes, finished dressing, looked round the room, and then went downstairs. It was about tea-time. Alice was in the kitchen playing with her toys. Mrs. Wright was in the cellar mangling clothes and Ada was busy in the kitchen putting other clothes before the fire and keeping an eye on the little girl. The kettle was on the hob singing quietly.

Emmie looked out of the window and saw the roofs of some of the "shops" belonging to the factory — there was the dye shop straight in front of her, and to the right the planking shop.

She shook her head: she would have to come to a decision. The life in those works must be controlled by

somebody. Would it be better to have nothing to do with it but just to draw an income from it, or to go in and about it, feel its pulse, see what was going on, manage it — rule it? She sighed. The decision was no easy thing.

As she turned and looked round the kitchen, which was now very clean and tidy, she felt that great content that the middle-class woman feels at tea-time. It was probably the happiest hour of the day. As she stood for a moment letting her thoughts drift from hat-making to tea-making Emmie wondered why this tea-time should be so pleasant comparatively and so regularly pleasant. . . . Emmie now felt a more glowing satisfaction than at any hour of the day previously. The kettle on the hob was a symbol and sign of something peculiarly soothing; why the kettle more than a pan of potatoes? A pan of potatoes! It never gave Emmie a thrill, or few women for that matter, but a kettle singing on the hob at tea-time was music.

As Emmie walked to the fireplace, glanced at the clock on the mantel shelf and pulled the kettle a little further from the fire so that it should not boil too soon, she saw the average woman of her class — present class at any rate — washed and dressed, the back of the day's work broken at tea-time. No wonder the singing kettle was a joy to hear, quite apart from the liking for tea as a beverage. With men it was different; they worked just as hard after tea as before: they did not get through their hard work first and find about tea-time they could wash and put on other clothes which supplied in themselves an emotion of satisfaction and contemplate a smoother time for the rest of the day.

Emmie turned round, her thoughts moving quickly from reflection to action.

"You'd better wash that lettuce and cress, Ada," she said.

"Yes'm."

"Wash it carefully now; don't just put it under the tap — that won't do."

"No'm."

Emmie meanwhile went to the dresser, took out a tablecloth which she spread on the kitchen table.

"When you've washed that, put the tea things on," she said to Ada, and she ran down the cellar steps for the bread and butter. "We'll have tea in about five minutes, Mrs. Wright."

"I can do with my tea," said Mrs. Wright.

"Have you nearly finished?"

"I'm gettin' on."

"That's right."

Emmie came up with the bread and butter and at once began to cut and butter slices.

They all sat down to tea together in the kitchen, Emmie, the two children, Mrs. Wright the charwoman, and Ada. Emmie had no pride of caste if it interfered with comfort. She and Tim had taken most of their meals in the kitchen, although Mr. Booke and Tim had lived in the dining-room because the housekeeper, Mrs. Bane, and Ada occupied the kitchen. But living in the dining-room now meant using another room, and the kitchen was so convenient. And what did it matter if Ada sat down to meals with them? It did none of them any harm. The food wasn't worse and Ada was a bit of company. . . . As for Mrs. Wright, well, why not? It didn't happen always, and Mrs. Wright only came twice a week, on Mondays and Fridays — on Mondays for washing principally, and on Fridays for cleaning. Of course, if there was anybody else there Emmie went to the dining-room.

It was when you had to clean things that you took care not to be so quick to dirty them.

The tea consisted of bread and butter with lettuce and cress, some jam, and a boiled egg for Mrs. Wright, whose labours were reckoned to demand the extra sustenance.

After tea Mrs. Holten and Miss Booke called, and they were shown into the dining-room, for Mrs. Wright was now using the table in the kitchen for her ironing.

The children were with Emmie at first, but were fetched by Ada to be bathed and put to bed.

Mrs. Holten and Miss Booke began sympathetically. How was Emmie — keeping up well? She must, of course, for the children's sake. She must devote herself wholly to the children. She had plenty of friends to help and guide her.

She received a few compliments: she had behaved very well and very sensibly.

"And," said Mrs. Holten, "Tim certainly behaved very handsomely towards you, Emmie."

"I was his wife," said Emmie, simply.

"I am not saying a word against him or you," replied Mrs. Holten quickly. "I think it was very, very good of him, and, I will say this, I think you made him a good wife."

"Still, there's the children," said Miss Booke.

"Of course, Emmie understands," said Mrs. Holten, "don't you — that though Tim left everything to you, yet really it is all in the nature of a trust for the children?"

"I should think so, indeed," said Miss Booke, so quickly that she managed to give Emmie a blow.

Emmie had aged considerably from an intellectual and resolute point of view since her marriage, and particularly since Tim's death. It was as if the moment she felt

herself alone she was capable of taking care of herself and assume, almost instantly, the masculine virtue of decision. The qualities were doubtless dormant in her and found scope in opportunity and necessity.

"I think I can be trusted to look after my own children," she said.

Miss Booke shut her mouth, and her face showed an expression that did not give an absolute and complete approval of Emmie's speech.

"Of course, there are the works," said Mrs. Holten significantly.

"T. Booke & Son," said Miss Booke, mouthing it magnificently. "We Bookes think something of that."

Emmie was not at all cowed. The days when these two ladies could fill her with awe were past.

"You can see, Emmie," said Mrs. Holten, with a softer intonation than Miss Booke's, "that we feel very anxious about the works; we are very anxious about them."

"Yes," said Emmie.

"You understand, don't you?" pressed Mrs. Holten.

"I don't know how you can be more anxious about them than I am, since they will supply my income."

"That shows you don't understand," said Miss Booke.

"Ours is a feeling of — er — sentiment, pride, honour, if you like."

"There is nothing to stop you having a feeling of pride and honour in the works if you like, so far as I can see," said Emmie.

They could all tell that the situation had reached a stratum where feelings were getting more taut, and emotion, unless well and carefully handled, might break loose.

Both Booke ladies seemed to bridle a little. Miss Booke, ever the most undisciplined and aggressive of the family, moved with patent uneasiness.

Mrs. Holten cleared her throat. Emmie had spoken quietly, but there was sufficient tone in it to disturb the two ladies, who considered themselves "superior"—taking the word in its amplest social sense — to one who had chanced to marry into the family but had, at one time, been one of the family's employés in the factory.

Emmie somehow felt strong and not uncomfortable.

"What's your objection to letting Grandpa look after the works?" Miss Booke asked.

Emmie understood. The two ladies had evidently been talking to grandpa about the works. He was not so pushful.

"I think Grandpa has earned his rest," said Emmie.

"He's willing to look after them," said Miss Booke, not at all suavely, but with a ring of arrogance in the tone.

"It's very good of him," said Emmie.

The two ladies began to move on their seats. Fancy being talked to like this by a young creature like Emmie. . . . Emmie *Bollins* — that was their disturbing thought.

Miss Booke wanted to dash in furiously, but Mrs. Holten, thoroughly understanding her sister's tactics and tactlessness, leaned forward slightly.

"Yes, but, Emmie, if he's good enough to do it for the sake of the family, for the sake of the name — Booke —" she paused a moment for emphasis —"for your little boy . . . don't you think you ought to be very grateful and accept his offer so that we can all feel comfortable?"

"I see," said Emmie. "Have you come to tell me this?"

"And very good of us, too," snapped Miss Booke.

"If we have," added Mrs. Holten, "I think you ought to be thankful we take such an interest in you."

"You mean in T. Booke & Son," said Emmie calmly.

"T. Booke & Son" . . . there were sniffs. "It's your income. If it hadn't been for T. Booke & Son you wouldn't have been as lucky as you have been." Miss Booke kept turning on her chair as she rapped out her phrases.

Emmie was slightly flushed, but her head was calm and the vision clear.

"You want grandpa to manage the works, is that it?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Holten.

"Of course we do," burst out Miss Booke. "There's nothing else to be done. It's very hard on Timothy, very hard on him. It's noble of him to come forward. I can't understand how there can be any hesitation — or anybody else with proper feeling, either."

Emmie was feeling sterner. She saw these women had come with a sense of grievance, and had meant to put her in her place.

"Yes," she said quietly. "I don't think, Aunt Maria, that I need to be talked to quite like that."

"There'd be no question of talking to you quite like that if you'd do the proper thing."

"When you say the proper thing you mean what you want," replied Emmie, and she paused. "Well, I haven't quite made up my mind . . . at least, I hadn't when you came in. I think Ernest Mullins is capable of managing the business and, er —"

"But who's going to look after him?" asked Mrs. Holten.

"Suppose he doesn't make them pay?"

"I can look after him," said Emmie.

"You!"

"You!"

The voices were in unison. Both ladies were now showing their emotion.

"You?" repeated Miss Booke. "Don't be a—" She stopped herself just in time.

"A fool?" said Emmie.

"I didn't say it, but—" Miss Booke nodded with such a significant expression that she might properly be understood to stand to what she repressed.

"If I were in any difficulty or doubt I could always ask grandpa," Emmie ventured.

"If I were in his place, I'd let you ask," said Miss Booke.

"You're not capable of managing those works. You're only an average woman, Emmie; you're not exceptional."

"Well, I shouldn't want to worry him too much, but perhaps he wouldn't mind . . . for the sake of the family, for the sake of the name . . . for Tim. . . ."

She was moved as she said the last, but managed to control herself. Average woman . . . was it a compliment or not? Emmie was not offended by that.

"You're very obstinate," said Mrs. Holten sharply.

"Worse than obstinate," added Miss Booke.

"I can't understand it," said Mrs. Holten. "You know nothing about the business."

"Except trimming," added Miss Booke savagely.

Emmie's eyes blazed. She almost burst into tears. She seemed to be—between anger and resentment and humiliation and tears. She wanted to shout bitter words at this vinegar-tongued woman, and she wanted to weep in sheer self-pity. But through the battle of her emotions something steadied and calmed and restrained her. It was as if her intellect directed her. She had withstood tongues dipped in gall and wormwood before; she

had more than once been reminded of her position as a trimmer.

As the emotion beat itself to pieces while her hands shook and her eyelids trembled, she found herself gently assuming the upper hand of gibes.

"Yes," she said, looking uncannily at Miss Booke, "as you say, I know something about trimming."

She shut her mouth tightly, and the remark seemed to have a fine defiance in it.

Miss Booke said to herself, "Well!" in a huge volume, and looked staggered.

Mrs. Holten was amazed. Emmie seemed so solid. Was this mere obstinacy, or what? The Bookes could be obstinate and hold tight and shut their lips — sulk, even, for months at a time. But this was something of another kind altogether: Emmie seemed to keep her wits about her, and to talk reasonably.

A level-headed woman, apart from her natural inclination to domineer, Mrs. Holten saw their point was not so easily to be gained as they had imagined. They had taken it for granted that their brother would supervise, in some way, the business of T. Booke & Son, and when they heard from him that it was not at all a settled thing, that Emmie had not apparently made up her mind yet what to do, that she might have Ernest Mullins as manager and try to keep an eye on him herself, they flared in wrath and decided they would at once let Emmie know what *they* thought of such ideas, and would quickly put her in her place. Hence the conversation and the surprise.

"What are you going to do, Emmie?" Mrs. Holten asked, still with a trace of asperity, but with a good deal of the arrogance gone.

Emmie's lips were shut tight. Try to master her,

would they? . . . Remind her of her trimming days, eh?

Her face was hard. But she still was able to keep her pulse on the thing under discussion.

She paused deliberately: let these people see they could not do as they liked with her?

"I haven't made up my mind yet," she replied quietly.

Mrs. Holten was beginning to see that their tactics had been wrong, but they were both of the rather hectoring breed and could not cajole after summoning.

Miss Booke still looked furious. She had little patience with differences of opinion at the best of times, and with Emmie — Emmie *Bollins,* mind — she thought it easy to make a clean sweep of opposition. She still wanted to say the bitter and galling thing, finding it gave her more satisfaction to ease her temper than to gain a victory.

She said, shortly: "Nice thing to see T. Booke & Son go to ruin."

Emmie had to hold a very tight rein over her tongue.

"I don't see why it should go to ruin," she said.

"Nobody else, either," snapped Miss Booke. "But I can't see what anybody can expect but that, if you're going to try and poke your finger in it. What do you know about managing a works? I never heard of such a thing in my life. A young woman like you. It's ridiculous, positively ridiculous. You! It's —"

Emmie burst into tears. She had stood all she could in quietness. She had been stirred so much emotionally recently that the tears came, perhaps, a little sooner than usual, though the provocation in normal circumstances would have been great.

Mrs. Holten said "Oh," and looked a little distressed. She was angry with Emmie, but would not have spoken like Maria . . . she couldn't do that just now. . . .

Miss Booke sniffed. She could not bend even before tears.

Emmie caught her breath hard as she sobbed. Her feelings were torn and she was shaken with her emotion. Just at that moment Ada came in: "Mrs. Wright's going, 'm', an' Mr. Mullins is 'ere."

Emmie sniffed and wiped her eyes. Mrs. Holten looked uncomfortable. Miss Booke could apparently sit stolidly through any scene when her passion was roused.

"All right. I'll be there in a moment," said Emmie.

She stood up.

Mrs. Holten said: "I suppose we'd better be going. You think things over, Emmie; we only want you to do what is best, you know."

Miss Booke said, "Naturally." It was her best she could do in the way of softening matters.

They stood up and moved towards the door. They were not beautiful women; they had never been really pretty, but their long noses and big jaws showed some character. They were dressed very tastefully in black.

Mrs. Holten kissed Emmie.

"We're only advising for the best," she said.

And Miss Booke, as she pecked Emmie's cheek, added: "Don't you be foolish, now. We're older than you; we've had a lot more experience; you should be guided by us."

When they had gone, Emmie stood for a minute or two in the dining-room. She sighed and gasped over the hard things that had been said to her.

Yet these two aunts of Tim's were perhaps right. How could she properly overlook a hat factory? It did seem preposterous.

Yet when, later in the evening, she read the draft of the circular which Ernest had left with her, she was fascinated to almost complete forgetfulness of Mrs. Holten and Miss Booke.

"I regret to inform you of the death of Mr. Timothy Booke, sole proprietor of the business carried on as T. Booke & Son, which is now the absolute property of his widow. There will be no hitch in the carrying on of the business, and a continuance of your favours is requested.

"Mr. Ernest Mullins, who has been associated with the firm for the past ten years, and has acted as manager for the last five years, will continue to direct its affairs under the immediate supervision of the proprietor. . . ."

Emmie read and re-read the circular . . . "under the immediate supervision of the proprietor." That phrase thrilled her. She was almost frightened by it.

What was it made her so anxious to possess these works? Why could she not let "grandpa" look after them? She found it difficult to be clear of her motives even to herself. Was it power that she wanted? or did she really like taking a personal interest in the business? or was it something vaguer . . . she wanted to hold fast by what she had lest she should have it taken from her? or was it that she liked to do as she would with her own and did not care to be interfered with?

She did not bother much with motives. She was saying to herself most of the time: Shall I, or shall I not? Sometimes she thought it would be foolish of her to trust wholly to Ernest . . . at other moments she thought Tim had trusted him, and she, Emmie, felt he was to be trusted.

Then she thought of Miss Booke. Aunt Maria was unbearable. She, Emmie, would not give way to her.

Before she went to bed she had made up her mind that Ernest Mullins should be made manager, "under the immediate supervision of the proprietor."

But she tossed a good deal before going to sleep that night.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE next morning Emmie experienced the feeling of loneliness that had come to her each awakening since Tim's death. As she turned round in bed she felt very sad. No man beside her. . . . No male companionship, and she was still young enough to desire it. . . .

When she was once up and dressed she felt better. This morning she thought of the works. She must look after her business now. She at once began to comfort herself with the thought that Ernest would manage all right. What about those works near the station where there was a manager — they prospered well enough, and there was no father and son looking after them. . . . There were a lot of women shareholders, too, for that matter. Ernest would manage well enough, and she would keep him up to the mark. The words in the circular recurred to her, "under the immediate supervision of the proprietor. . . ."

She went to the children's room to dress Tim and Alice.

She opened the door quietly, so as not to wake them too suddenly, and entered with a glad welcoming smile on her face. Emmie certainly loved her children. She noticed the warm, faint odour, and went at once to the window and drew up the blind.

Tim turned over, rubbed his eyes and sat up.

Emmie took him in her arms and kissed him. Not thoroughly awake, he laid his head on her breast and snuggled to her. She loved to feel him like that and pulled him out of bed.

"Billy Winkers not gone yet?" She sat on the edge of the bed and nursed him, taking a delight in holding his warm little body and looking at his healthy smooth skin.

Tim sat up on her knee. He was awake now.

Emmie pushed her hand through his tousled hair.

"You must have your hair cut, darling."

"Mammy."

"Well, dear."

"When Jack the Giant Killer cut the bridge, you know, how deep was the water?"

"Oh! . . . Deep enough to drown him if he wasn't careful. . . . Now you get dressed quickly or perhaps the Giant will come and take your clothes."

"He can't."

"Why can't he?"

"Well, because Jack killed him —"

"Mam*mie* —" It was Alice shouting.

Emmie put Tim down. "Now there are your clothes, dear. Hurry up, for if Jack killed one giant, perhaps there's another one."

Tim stood in a very thoughtful attitude.

"Could he get in that door, Mammy?"

"Mam-mie . . ." shouted Alice, kneeling in bed.

"Yes, dear. . . ." Emmie walked to Alice's cot. "Get dressed, Tim darling, quickly."

"But could he get in that door, Mammy?" said Tim, as he held his little trousers in his hands.

"Mammie, Mammie, Mammie," said Alice, as she threw her arms round her mother's neck and was lifted out of bed.

"I think he'd crack himself," said Emmie.

Tim considered.

"With bending, Mammy?"

"Yes, darling."

Tim thought again.

"But if he went on his knees — couldn't he get in then?"

"Ada would have chopped his head off by that time. Now get on, darling."

"Mammie," said Alice, "what would Ada chop?"

"The giant, darling, who might try and gobble you up if you don't get washed and dressed quickly."

"I'll be washed first," said Tim, as he hurried into his clothes.

"No, me first," cried Alice.

"Me, me," said Tim, hurrying.

Alice slipped onto the ground and began to run in her nightdress towards the bathroom.

Emmie caught her up and she cried and had to be soothed, and Tim dashed away in the turmoil; but with patience and tact and the exercise of a brief authority Emmie got her children dressed and washed and ready for breakfast.

As she tidied the children's room before going down, Emmie thought: "No more children. . . ." She was not sure that she wanted any more, but the mere thought of the reason depressed her. . . .

She opened the window, folded the children's nightdresses, threw the bedclothes back and left the door open.

Ada was outside cleaning the steps, and Emmie at once began to see to breakfast. The children had bread and milk with syrup and bread afterwards. Ada was given a rasher of bacon and Emmie had two rashers or sometimes one rasher and an egg; there were also pieces of bread cooked in the bacon fat. They all had breakfast in the kitchen, and in the middle of the meal Emmie, looking at the works, thought: "To think I own this

house and that factory. . . . I have an income of thirty pounds a week at least — and I'm not spending more than about four, with holidays and everything in. . . ." And then Tim interrupted her with: "Mammy."

"Yes, dear."

"Do giants have bread and milk for breakfast?"

"Yes, darling . . . when they are little."

Tim gobbled up his bread and milk greedily, as if his consuming desire at that moment was to become a giant.

"Mammy?"

"Yes, darling"— this to Alice.

"Do fairies?"

"Yes, darling — all the good ones."

"Baby going to be a fairy. . . ."

Ada, with staring eyes and a smile on her face said, "Eee. . . ." This struck her limited imagination fiercely.

In the course of the morning, when Emmie was wearing a cap on her head to keep her hair reasonably free of dust and a big apron to cover her clothes, Ernest Mullins came in. Emmie took off the cap but kept on the apron.

"I don't know if there's anything you'd like to see me about," said Ernest. He was wearing his cashmere jacket and black apron, which had two or three holes in it at the top where he was in the habit of leaning against things.

When Ernest came in Emmie felt a glow of satisfaction creeping over her, and when he spoke and made her thoroughly realise her position as the sole proprietor of T. Booke & Son she felt that glow growing warmer and keener. There was something in her that responded intensely to this sense of something to do or of power.

. . . Emmie did not probe herself, but the thoughts came with the emotions. She felt eager to busy herself with things and was not afraid of big things. Was it just a fine superlative vitality? Or what? . . .

She moved on her chair to pull her frock straight, and gave Ernest the impression of some one keen, alert, sensible, shrewd and penetrating. Clearly she knew very little about the details of hat-making or the business of a hat factory, but she was a willing learner and able.

"Just tell me what you're doing," she said. "What are you going to do to-day?"

Ernest felt a little amused; it was not so much a strange as an unexpected question. He was a manager and supervised; the question would have been quite easily answered by a person in the office, or one in the warehouse or by Miss Frisby, the giver-out.

But he understood; she was trying to get into touch with the business and he really wanted to let her grasp the details thoroughly.

"Well, to begin with, there's the letters—"

"Have you got them with you?" she asked eagerly, her natural curiosity being also excited by the correspondence.

"I brought a few," he said, putting a small bundle on the table and opening one.

Emmie became exceedingly interested. Almost all of them began, "Messrs. T. Booke & Son,

Gentlemen,"

To herself, in swift proclamation, Emmie felt: "'Messrs. T. Booke & Son, Gentlemen'—that's me!"

Ernest read them and explained where explanations were desirable, and Emmie handled the letters and read them again for her own satisfaction. They were of various kinds. "Enclosed please find cheque value so much

in payment of our account to March 31st. We shall be obliged with a receipt in due course."

Emmie was concise.

"What do you do with this?"

"The cheque is endorsed —"

"Who does that?"

"Walker does that, as a rule." Walker was the cashier. "Then he pays it in the bank. He sends off the receipt, too."

Emmie read an order: "Please place in hand at once and deliver at your earliest convenience, as the goods are urgently wanted:

"8	doz.	Conistons	Ang.	2½	brim	33/-.
4½	"	Mayfair	"	2¼	"	31/-.
12	"	Rosebery	"			37/6.
15	"	Parnell				30/9. . . ."

Emmie looked at the order.

"I suppose you hurry that up," she said.

"As quick as we can, of course, but most of 'em are urgently wanted. They take their turns."

Emmie did not altogether like that. "Take their turns. . . ." "Urgently wanted" sounded with pristine freshness in her ears.

Ernest saw her doubt. "Of course, they get pushed on as fast as possible, but we have to arrange to let nobody be disappointed, if possible. They'll write again if they want 'em badly."

Another letter found fault with something, and Emmie was concerned. She did not like it. "Not at all equal to sample. . . ." That did not sound nice.

"What's that?"

"I must inquire into it. It may be their mistake or ours. Perhaps Vigo made a mistake."

"Mr. Vigo — doesn't he travel?"

"Yes. He may have put down the wrong figure. At any rate I'll see it's set right."

"Yes. They shouldn't make mistakes. What's that Ang.? 8 doz. Conistons Ang.?"

"Anglesea curl."

"Of course," said Emmie; "I've seen that often enough."

There were more cheques, some accounts, more orders.

"I suppose you see to all these, Ernest?"

"Yes. I hand them out to those who have to deal with them."

"I see, the cheques to Mr. Walker, and so on. . . . I'd like just to have a walk round with you sometime."

"To-day?"

"Well, er. . . ." Emmie felt just a trifle diffident, and yet she was very desirous of seeing her works. Her father was a workman in her factory, and she knew many of them would refer to her as Sam Bollins' daughter, and perhaps suggest she was trying to "show off" or "swagger." . . . But her quick, decisive mind saved her a deal of worry. "Yes . . . I'll come after dinner," she said. "I only just want to have a peep round."

"Right," said Ernest. "I don't suppose you've really ever been over the place."

"No. How are things? Are we busy? Are we doing well?"

"Very fair. We're on full time and, as you can see, we keep getting a decent dose of orders — and those are by post direct, not from our travellers."

"H'm. . . . Well, I'll come in about three o'clock, Ernest — I'll come to the office first."

"Right."

When Ernest had gone Emmie sat still and considered. She who had once been a trimmer in those works was now

about to go over them as the mistress. It was wonderful . . . like a fairy tale. . . . And how interesting business was. A jolly sight, more interesting than housework, with its dusting and mopping and washing-up and bed-making — you're never done in a house . . . in a sense. . . .

Then she seemed to catch herself idling. She put the cap on her head again, picked up a brush and prepared to sweep the dining-room. She went first to the kitchen.

"Now, Ada, don't forget that lobby to-day, and scrub it well: put plenty of soap on your brush and make that pattern shine."

"Yes'm ——"

At three o'clock Emmie, dressed very neatly in black, went out of the back door of her house, through the gate and into the yard of the works. One or two of the men walking about in shirtsleeves and dirty aprons, carrying hats in process of manufacture, looked at her curiously and sheepishly. They were not sure if they ought to do anything — jerk their heads or smile or say "'Ow do?"

Emmie, for that matter, was not quite sure, either. As the men hurried away with their burdens Emmie went into the office.

Ernest was there.

"Here you are," he said, cheerfully. "You've been in here before, at any rate. You remember James, at any rate."

Emmie nodded to James Walters, the cashier, a man who had been with the firm for forty years. He was now about fifty-two, and had gone there when he was twelve as the office boy. He was bald, but had a big beard and a fine presence. He used to pay Emmie her wages.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Tim," he said, with a tiny bow.

"Good afternoon, James," and she thought to herself, I feel like putting my hand out for my money! and was tempted to smile at the association of the idea. It was actually she who paid James Walters his money now.

"These are the books," said Ernest, and he seemed to dispose of them with a wave of his hand. But Emmie said:

"Show me how the books are kept — what they show."

James Walters said: "Yes, Mrs. Tim," and was apparently very pleased to explain to Emmie how important the office was which he filled.

The system was merely a simple entry: the daybook showed the goods despatched and to whom, the account was transferred to the ledger and Emmie saw there when the customers paid.

She was interested, and thought James kept his books very neatly and wrote beautifully. . . . She almost wished she could write better than she did.

Johnny Dean, the fifteen-year-old invoice clerk, perched up on the big stool writing at the high desk, kept looking at Emmie and wondering if she would notice him . . . and what he should say if she did.

Emmie just smiled at him, as Ernest said: "You'd like to start at the beginning, wouldn't you?"

"Yes."

They walked out of the office, across the yard and into a building, a place where the floor was wet and the atmosphere steamy. It was a long room, with machines and pulleys and straps overhead and men in shirtsleeves and aprons worked at benches.

"Mind your dress," said Ernest.

Emmie picked her way carefully. It was a messy floor. Could nothing be done to keep the place clean?

Ernest said: "We'll go in here first," and he opened a door — not at all a door like those in the house, but rather planks fastened together and now covered with grime and dust and chipped and shrunk.

Again the wet, stony floor. Emmie still clutched her dress and noted where to put her feet, for there were puddles about.

"What a lot of wet," she said, as Ernest shut the door.

"Yes. That's hatting — heat and wet." He jerked his hand towards some men who were working round a hexagonal-shaped affair with boiling water in the middle. The men were in their shirtsleeves; some had no waistcoats; most of them wore clogs and all stood on a brick or two or pieces of wood to keep their feet dry and to give them power for their work. In front of the big aprons they wore they had a thick piece of felt to protect them against the water — which contained sulphuric acid.

The men seemed a little awkward at Emmie's entrance. Not all of them recognised her: some had probably never seen her before. One man who had known her to speak to familiarly before she was married was prepared to say "'Ow do?" but Emmie did not notice him across the steam.

Ernest said: "This is where we start," and he led her farther in the room, where the fur was being formed into a body.

He picked up out of a big box a handful of fur and explained that the finished hat was made of this soft, delicate fur, cut from the rabbit — coneys, as the trade called them.

Emmie murmured, "Rabbit." She had always known that hats were made of fur — the better hat — but she had not stopped to think that the rabbit had to die to let the hat be born.

Ernest went on to explain the machinery — how this fur was put in the big box and drawn onto the big revolving perforated cone by the draught caused by a fan underneath. When there was enough fur on to make a hat the man attending to it placed over it a damp cloth.

Emmie nodded and smiled at the man who, listening to Ernest's explanation, interrupted with: "Ah can remember you when you were in th' trimmin'-room."

"Oh!" said Emmie, smiling. "Have you been here long?"

"Twenty-three year, come November."

"It's musty," said Emmie to Ernest.

"Yes. Keep your mouth closed. This room's full of these floating hairs. That body you've seen formed on that cone has to be felted or planked. It's too soft as it is. It has to be shrunk so that the fur sticks close together — till it's a piece of felt, so to speak." Ernest now pointed to the other group. "It's being felted there."

"It's like folk is fur — it gets 'ardened by trouble an' experience," said the man who had spoken before. Emmie nodded. . . .

She now turned to watch the men at that hexagonal-shaped table with each side sloping to the little tank of boiling water and acid in the middle. She saw the men dip the fur "body" in the water, then roll it and press it and dip it in again and roll it and press it, and go on doing that. . . . It was their work. They were felters or plankers, and that was how they earned their money. Each man had a little can of cold water beside him in which to dip his hands to protect them from the heat. Their fingers seemed very white and swollen, as if the skin were dead.

"There's vitriol in that," said Ernest.

Tim Sharpe, the man who used to talk to Emmie, caught sight of her and she recognised him.

"'Avin' a look round?" he said.

"Yes."

There was silence for a moment. The men worked hard. Ernest did not wish to interfere too soon, but he wondered if Emmie cared for this recognition.

Tim Sharpe looked as if he would like to say something, when Ernest said: "Shall we go on?"

"Yes," said Emmie, and she nodded pleasantly to Sharpe and all the men, remarked there were a number of these curious-shaped things with the boiling water in the middle, and most of them had men working at them.

When she had gone Sharpe said: "I've walked out wi' her."

"Ast?"

"Ay."

"Tha'd walk out wi' onybody," said Tom Smail, an old hand, and they all laughed, Sharpe included, who took the remark as a compliment.

As Emmie walked out of this shop, across the yard she noticed crates lying about with "T. B. & Son" stamped on them.

Ernest caught her look. "We make those in the carpenter shop," he said. "I'll show you now the hat when it's hard."

Emmie glanced about her and saw the big boilers with the stacks of coal near. The engineer, Taylor, nodded.

"Seein' things?" he asked.

"Yes."

"That's reet."

"How do we buy coal?" Emmie asked Ernest.

"Six months' contract — sometimes twelve. We want a lot of coal to keep this place going."

Amazing. . . . Emmie, struck by the intricacy of the place, could not help feeling very proud and thrilled. This was hers. The place was freehold and the very spot where they walked — that part of the earth, at any rate, was hers. All that machinery, too, and that material. . . .

Men passed her in dirty aprons, dirty shirts, dirty boots or clogs, carrying hats in almost all processes of manufacture. Girls and women, some with shawls over their heads or shoulders, also passed her and shot at her curious glances.

Ernest led her into the room where the soft felt body of the hat was made hard by being stiffened with a varnish of shellac. And everywhere Emmie seemed to meet a familiar smell. There was a general odour of a hat works and there were particular odours in each shop. Here the pungent varnish assailed her.

Her attention was keen: she wanted to know where the shellac came from and what it cost.

Ernest said: "Mr. Timothy used to say you were always safe if you bought it at ninety shillings a hundredweight; but it's a fluctuating thing."

From this keen, sharp-scented room she just put her head into a place where a stove, every side of which was red hot, dried these hats, which were placed on wooden racks round it and looked as if they might take fire.

"I didn't know there was such a place," she said.

"The hats must dry," said Ernest.

Afterwards came the blocking, which meant that the felt had been pulled over a wooden block to give it the required shape.

She remembered the dye-kettles, the great coppers, enclosed in brick with their boiling dye. Had she not, as

a child, been fascinated with the sight of these and wondered many a time if a man who stirred the hats with the long pole had ever tumbled in . . . and what had happened to him if he had . . . and could one make niggers and black men that way?

As they left the dye shop Emmie noticed a little shed with a curious kind of axe in it, and rather attractive wood.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Logwood. We make dye of it. But there's something coming in called aniline dye. . . . I don't know if it'll be any good, but it's being used."

Emmie stopped once, as if she would try to recall it all. She smiled. "I wonder if I shall remember," she said.

"Easy enough. Once you know your way about you can always look round, can't you?"

"Yes."

Look round her own works. . . . She should think so. But there was more in hatting than she had thought. Imagine the little rabbit running about, and the felt hat in every shape and form, soft or hard, black, white, brown, terra-cotta — any colour — were all made from its fur. . . . Wonderful!

Another smell in the finishing shop. And here there was a special noise, and both noise and smell appealed to her at once, for before she had started trimming she had come many a time to this place to bring her father his tea.

There the hats were being finished, and her father was a "finisher." The hat was put on a block made to revolve by the pulling of a lever, and as it spun round the finisher held fine emery paper to it and finally gave it a polish.

Most of the finishers knew her. One of them next to Bollins said: "Here's your Emmie."

Bollins looked up. He swallowed. He had held his head proudly in that shop ever since his daughter had married the boss's son.

Emmie went straight up to him.

"Well, Father."

"Hello. . . . Having a look over your shop?"

"Yes." She nodded to the men near. Ernest talked to one or two about the hats they were engaged on.

The man working next to Bollins said to Emmie:

"I can remember you when you were no higher than this here"—he pointed to the bench.

"I think I remember you," she said.

"You ought to," he replied quickly.

Weston, a solemn-looking man, said quietly: "It's a funny world! I never thowt when I used to see you comin' 'ere with your father's tea that one day these 'ud all be yours — they're gradely yours, arena they?"

"Yes."

"So I 'eard." He nodded his head, spun round his hat and applied velours to it.

"You know what this is?" said Ernest to her.

"Yes — being finished."

She nodded, picked up her dress. "Come and have some supper, Father, to-night, won't you?"

"To-night . . . h'm . . . all right."

"I'll send word to mother."

Emmie, holding her dress, nodded pleasantly as she passed the men, noted the hats about, the smell, the noise of the whirring machines and went out into the yard.

"There's the trimming now," said Ernest.

Emmie smiled. She was feeling very happy.

"Yes. . . . Well . . . er." She hesitated. It would

be rather a triumph to return to that room as the employer of all the trimmers! And yet . . . there were other considerations. . . .

"At any rate, you don't want to be told anything about that," said Ernest, breaking in on her thoughts.

She laughed. "No." It would perhaps be best not to visit so publicly the scene of her employé days.

"There's the warehouse," said Ernest.

"I'll see that."

Even now she could recall the desire she had when a trimmer to go into the warehouse. Perhaps it was because the men there were usually more polished, not so untidy or dirty or rough looking as at the plank.

She climbed stairs and entered a spacious room with hats of every variety lying about in abundance. Hats were in parcels and in boxes, on racks and shelves and benches.

Two or three young men moved about aisles and passages and carried parcels under their arms or balanced a dozen boxes or looked at a hat.

"This is Arthur Sims," said Ernest.

Emmie said: "Oh, yes. Of course."

She remembered Arthur Sims: he had always been shy when he had been obliged to come into the trimming-room. He was father now, and had a moustache and a beard that was a couple of days too long.

"Having a look round?" he said, pronouncing both his "h" and his "g" very distinctly.

"Yes."

Arthur turned to Ernest.

"That lot from S. W. & Co. haven't come yet, Ernest."

"Haven't they?"

"No."

"Better send a boy."

"I think so; we want 'em badly."

Emmie wondered: I wonder what they call me amongst themselves — Emmie or Mrs. Tim? All the men had Christian names, and nothing else, when they addressed one another. Then she looked at the big stock of hats: here they were gathered, put into parcels and then sent to be packed in crates to be despatched to all quarters. . . .

And it was all hers — every bit of it.

She gasped. It was a most amazing thing.

The windows of the warehouse looked over fields at the back — rather dirty looking fields, but Emmie thought the outlook rather pleasant. The green was cheerful and the hedges and bunches of trees struck her pleasantly.

"Of course there's a lot more," said Ernest.

"I think this will do for to-day," Emmie answered. "Good afternoon . . . Arthur."

"Good afternoon, er — er —" He got no further with the name.

As Emmie stood at the doorway she thought: I would like to go in that trimming-room. . . . Just pop my head in. . . . Alice Cannell isn't there now. . . . I wonder who is? . . . They'd say I only went in to show off. She chuckled: and I could sack the lot of them if I wanted. . . .

Ernest said: "Thinking of something pleasant?"

"Just wondering. . . . I think I'll go now. If I can remember what I've seen to-day I shall do very well."

"You must come in often. You'll soon get to know things then."

"It seems dirty, somehow. I suppose it couldn't be kept clean?"

Ernest shook his head.

"What can you do with steam? It means water, and

that always means mud if there's any walking about. And for hats you must have moisture and pressure and heat. The place is swept every morning and it's as you see it now every afternoon. You couldn't expect miners to keep spotless, could you?"

"No, I suppose it's part of the trade. Well, thank you, Ernest. I'll leave you now. Come in if there's anything you want to tell me to-night."

"Right."

Emmie picked up her dress again, walked down the steps into the yard, caught that general odour of hats, an odour that suggests hats to the hatter and nothing else, realised she was in a most familiar atmosphere, and went across the yard into her own house, where she sat down and said to herself: "Well . . . it's been like going over an estate. . . ."

Let another take *that* out of her hands. . . . What a fool she would have been! She was thrilled with the visit and its revelation to her of her possession.

CHAPTER XIX

MRS. HOLTEN and Miss Booke did not cover up their feelings over Emmie's assumption of "immediate supervision" of T. Booke & Son's. These two ladies were not in the habit of covering up their feelings and habit had given their tongues an almost licentious freedom. And yet they swung between outspokenness and silence, both harbours of refuge for those who feel. Emmie could not be ignored after all; she was Tim's widow; she did bear the name of Booke and the Bookes were very sensitive to public opinion. They liked that opinion to approve of Bookes in full circumstances, even though they realised on occasions that they were not altogether popular.

Timothy said nothing. He was anxious and wished well to Emmie, but he did not want the business to suffer. He had a fear that if T. Booke & Son went down he would hear gibes and sneers — or at least feel them. There is not even virtue in failure to command a sympathy of substance. So, though he was apprehensive, his pride forbade any appeal to Emmie. He was a man of his word, stubborn and obstinate, reliable, but not loveable to the average.

He rarely spoke of the business to Emmie. Occasionally he would say: "Things going on all right?" as if he hungered for some news. Emmie generally reassured him, and as he saw the works on full time and on overtime in the busy season, he began to lose some of his fears and to entertain a higher respect for his daughter-in-law. He got on with Emmie very well, generally

speaking. He knew she had been a good wife to Tim and, as far as he could judge, she was a good mother to the children and brought no discredit on the name she bore. Besides, her personality pleased him.

Mrs. Grass, also, was very frendly with Emmie. She went with her now and then to Manchester when they shopped together, and had tea in St. Anne's Square.

But Mrs. Holten and Miss Booke could not altogether overlook the fact that Emmie (Emmie Bollins, when it was a question of putting her down) had ignored their advice, braved them, passed Timothy by and assumed possession of *their* factory. Of course, it was theirs when they thought of it in relation to Emmie Bollins, though they did not own a stone or stick in the place. But sentimentally, ideally, feelingly it was theirs. They were Bookes: the firm was T. Booke & Son, and that Emmie Bollins, through having the luck to marry Tim, had inherited the business and had taken possession of it as if it had been in her family for generations. . . .

It is also probable they were a little jealous of Emmie, even though they were comforted to some extent when they knew the business continued to prosper. They put the credit generally on the reputation of the firm and the sound lines upon which it had been built up. Ernest Mullins had only got to keep it on those lines. And Emmie . . . she had only to draw the money. . . .

They tried to adopt that tone occasionally with Emmie. They said how grateful she ought to be that she had a business so soundly put together that it could go by itself now. . . . It would have been a serious thing if T. Booke & Son had had a poor foundation . . . whatever would she have done? The place would have collapsed without grandpa's guidance. . . . She could thank her stars the Bookes had been such good business people

in the past. As for Ernest Mullins, well, he was steady, thank God! but steadiness wasn't enough nowadays — unless, of course, you had the luck to come in for an old and well-established business, and even then. . . . Well. . . .

Here followed wagging of heads. Mrs. Holten and Miss Booke could do this kind of thing remarkably well. Mrs. Grass, when she was present, would wish her sisters wouldn't get at Emmie so much, and the men would say to themselves it was a "damn shame," although Timothy comforted himself with the thought that Emmie could look after herself.

And Emmie could. It may have been philosophy or merely her temperament or her health and great vitality or simply tolerance due to her prosperity, but she rarely replied. Occasionally she got in a neat little blow and generally gave the Booke ladies to feel there was substance for them if they went too far; but she rarely made a fuss over their remarks. She could be silent or smile and talk about something else and go on with the business and life as if she were neither to be worried nor bound down by the ladies of the family into which she had married. Yet at the same time neither they nor the family could be ignored. She was Mrs. Booke. She was "T. Booke & Son." She always felt the Bookes had got hold of her and she considered herself as one of the family with the family obligations on her.

Her life was full, but not exciting. She was happy because she had plenty to do and was quite capable of doing it all with zest. She attended to her children well, she managed her house well, and she carried out faithfully the note on the circular: she gave a personal supervision to the business of T. Booke & Son.

Her children grew up, the business fluctuated. In

1893 there were hard times. There was a great cotton strike in Lancashire, and when weavers and spinners get no wages they can't buy hats. Agriculture was very depressed. And in 1893, too, there was also a great coal strike, settled ultimately by Lord Rosebery's intervention on the suggestion of Mr. Gladstone.

These things sent hatting under a cloud, but as Emmie knew that most hat shops in Ganton suffered, she was not depressed.

In 1895 Emmie was still radiantly healthy. She was just thirty years of age, and scarcely looked it. She had been a widow over three years and was now wearing colours again and spending rather more on dress than the average hat manufacturer's wife in Ganton, for she had no one to check her, no one to say, "That's a lot o' money!" Not that Tim would have said that, only Emmie knew if he had been alive she would not have been quite so extravagant on dress.

In the Summer of 1895 Emmie went with her children to Blackpool. Mrs. Grass went with her, and Miss Booke thought she would join them later.

Emmie Booke did not go as Emmie Bollins had gone. Emmie almost always thought of that when she went to Blackpool. Those cheap rooms with Alice Cannell (who was now married to a warehouseman employed by Yates, Beeston & Higgins). . . . But she was happy then. . . . Tim was just making up to her.

Now she went to "The Towers," one of the most expensive boarding houses in the place. She stayed a fortnight and did herself well.

She had thoroughly enjoyed the preparations for going away, even though they had entailed labour, for the anticipations had been most agreeable. She would do no work for a fortnight and she would thoroughly enjoy

herself. She took Ada with her to help with Tim and Alice, who were now nine and six respectively.

Mrs. Grass and Emmie and the two children sat at a little table reserved exclusively for them. Both Mrs. Grass and Emmie shot curious and searching glances at the occupants of the other tables.

"Emmie," whispered Mrs. Grass.

"Yes."

"That's a nice table in the corner — to my left."

"You mean that lady in black and white."

"Yes. That's a lady, if you like. I shouldn't be surprised if she isn't somebody," Mrs. Grass nodded; "somebody that *is* somebody, you know. You can meet nice people at this place."

Emmie nodded.

"She does look stylish. . . . I suppose that's her husband, and those two will be her daughters." Emmie was observing with keenness the lady's dress.

"H'm. . . . There was a baronet's wife here once," said Mrs. Grass, "when Fred and I came once in September. Yes . . . stuck-up thing, though. She used to walk out of this room as if she owned the place . . . head up. . . . She sat over by the window there. This fish is nice — nicely cooked."

"Yes, they might put a few more shrimps in the sauce."

"Yes, they're cheap enough. I like that brown dress — by your right."

"Um-m. . . ."

Mrs. Grass, as she ate, put her knife and fork down with a far greater deliberateness than was her custom — except, of course, in hotels and boarding-houses. She sat up well, too, and looked round her very keenly, but also with the consciousness that if anybody was observing

her then they should get her at what she would try to be her best.

Emmie was not dissimilar. Emmie's youth and character and good looks and prosperity gave her a feeling of self-confidence that was more than an unafraidness of scrutiny — it is almost an invitation. She turned round and looked round at first with a little diffidence because she could not at once be thoroughly at her ease in circumstances that were different from usual; but very quickly she assimilated the novelty — and was easier sooner than Mrs. Grass.

Emmie was a striking figure and she speedily saw she was the observed of a good many observers. She could tell what the comments were. . . . "A good-looking woman. . . ." "That's a pretty woman." She knew it. She could tell from their looks and attitudes that was what they were saying. She wondered what some of them would say if they knew she owned a hat factory.

These thoughts came and went speedily and had no spoiling effect on her. She looked after her children, who behaved very well, and gossiped easily with Mrs. Grass.

"Very nice dinner," whispered Mrs. Grass, as they sipped their coffee.

"Yes." Emmie had enjoyed the five-course dinner with the well-dressed people round her. "Now you can have a little walk, children, and then bed."

"Can I paddle to-morrow morning, Mother?" asked Tim.

"Yes, dear."

"Me, too, Mammy?" asked Alice.

"Yes, dear; you, too, if you want."

"I'm going to take my bucket and spade out to-morrow, Mother."

"So am I," said Alice.

"Mother?"

"Yes, dear."

"Why do we have dinner at seven o'clock?" asked Tim.

"It's usual here, dear."

Mrs. Grass looked at Emmie with a queer smile on her face and wanted to "hush" Tim; and Emmie smiled and Tim was convinced the whole arrangement was very funny.

"What shall we do — go on the pier?" asked Mrs. Grass.

"If you like."

"I always think you get good fresh air that way, and we can get a fortnightly ticket straightaway."

So after dinner Mrs. Grass and Emmie went to their rooms to put on their hats and mantles, and Ada was told to take the children for a walk along the front and then put them to bed.

However, when Emmie came down, she saw a gentleman talking to Tim and Alice. He was sitting in a big wicker chair by the door and had Alice on his knee. Tim was standing by him and looking very interested.

Tim had explained that his father was dead — it came out in answer to a remark from the gentleman, but came out also with a certain not quite pride, but zest, as if Tim had got a good deal of sympathy and petting and probably pence through being fatherless. And Alice had added a swift corroboration: "I've no daddy either."

And the gentleman had said that he knew they were very good to their mother then, a statement with which they were both willing and eager to agree. Then he took a shark's tooth from his pocket and asked them if they knew what it was and, of course, he had to explain, and he did it so delightfully that the children were interested

at once and wanted to know all about sharks and ships and deep waters. . . .

Emmie came down to a rather striking picture.

She, herself, was striking. Her eyes were bright; she looked well, she was dressed well, and she smiled at her children.

The gentleman got up.

"I am afraid I am keeping your beautiful children from getting out, but it is such a pleasure to get home again and see bonny English children."

Emmie scarcely knew what to say.

"I hope they haven't disturbed you," she muttered.

"Disturbed me . . . on the contrary ——"

"Mother," said Tim, "the gentleman's got a shark's tooth — from a shark, a great big fish that eats men. Show it mother," he said to the gentleman, who smiled depreciatingly, took out the tooth and said casually: "One we caught about a day's sail from Adelaide. Luckily, we don't get the beasts here. But I mustn't keep you." He said it very politely and Emmie felt the politeness and a note of something else. "I suppose you are going to have a little stroll with them."

"Well, now," said Emmie, "I am with my aunt, and we are going on the pier: the children are just taking a turn with the maid before going to bed."

He nodded very pleasantly.

"There's an excellent concert on the pier to-night."

And then Mrs. Grass came down and Ada went off with the children, and Emmie nodded to the gentleman and Mrs. Grass also nodded slightly, scarcely knowing what she ought to do, not having been introduced, though, as she thought, it really didn't matter in boarding-houses, as you generally talked to people and got to know them that way without introductions.

And what a nice gentleman he looked. . . .

As Emmie and Mrs. Grass walked away Mrs. Grass whispered:

"Who is that? Do you know him?"

"He was talking to Tim and Alice when I came down."

"Oh-h. . . . He looked very nice . . . quite a gentleman. . . . But I've always noticed they have very nice people staying at The Towers. They do well — they do that. I told you about that Lady Somebody or other — Lady Roller, yes, that was it, Lady Roller — came from near London, I heard. There was such a nice clergyman's wife there, too: no stuck-upness about her, and not always talking about religion. Your Aunt Jane was struck with her — such a lady she was. Doesn't this air feel fresh?"

Mrs. Grass inhaled noisily.

Emmie nodded. "Yes, Blackpool always agrees with me."

But she was saying to herself: "I wonder who that man was. . . . Travelled, at any rate. . . . And so gentlemanly. . . . What a nice voice! And he didn't have eyes in his head for nothing, either. . . . Had he talked to Tim and Alice so that he could talk to the mother?"

Emmie was able to note other people quickly, but she was also characteristically feminine in noting or wondering what effect she produced on other people. Had she really made some sort of an impression on that gentleman? Perhaps he had been watching her at dinner. . . . It was nothing, of course, but it was interesting . . . very interesting. . . .

A woman never grows out of the satisfaction she gets from being interesting to a man.

"We're going on the pier, aren't we?" said Mrs. Grass.

"Yes," said Emmie. "He said — that gentleman, you know — there was a good concert there to-night."

"I'm glad. I don't like classical stuff so much. I like Gilbert and Sullivan, don't you? Have you ever seen 'The Gondoliers'?"

"Yes. . . ."

"Lovely, isn't it? Is he — that gentleman — going on the pier?"

"I don't know," said Emmie. "He said he supposed we were going for a stroll, and I said we were going on the pier, so he said there was a good concert there to-night."

"Oh-h. . . ." She inhaled again. "This air is good."

Emmie agreed, and noted the people walking about, the unmistakable Lancashire accent and the equally unmistakable accent that had no trace of provincialism in it, and this Emmie liked to hear. She liked to think sometimes she talked like that — when she was careful.

But what she thought of most just now was the gentleman who was talking to Tim. . . . He had made an impression on her. What a fine, gentlemanly man he was! Spoke easily and with no Lancashire accent — a gentleman, one could see that. And that look in his eyes. . . . He wasn't just seeing when he looked like that. No fear. He was reading, conveying a message. . . .

Emmie felt a great satisfaction in this disturbance of a male — and such an one, too! There were pretty girls in that boarding-house, and this fine, handsome gentleman talked to her children and then to her and looked at her — well, if he didn't like looking at her, to put it mildly, he'd no business to look at her as he did. And yet, of course, it was really nothing, scarcely noticeable

. . . perhaps he was one of those men who looked at every woman; well, every pretty woman, like that. There were lots of them about.

But she could see his eyes full of appreciation and satisfaction; she could see them travel over her clothes, and knew he was taking in her dress and her figure. Well . . . she could stand being looked at for *either* and didn't care what *anybody* said. . . .

The sun had just set and the sky near the horizon was in bands of gorgeous colours from black to a blood-red, with a blue-grey dome above, where floated lost clouds, tender wisps of things, as if some lovely creature had left a shawl or a bit of lace behind her.

The water danced with shadows of light. A steamer coming back from the Isle of Man or Llandudno or Liverpool puffed a long, lazy line of black smoke against a dark band of cloud; two vessels with nut-brown sails emptied their passengers on the sands, while the dark silhouettes of the curious spectators showed clear against the foaming waves and glistening sea.

Many of the people had no capes or coats. The blouses had the big balloon sleeves and the dresses were inclined to trail if not held up. Emmie was wearing a plain pale mauve cloth skirt, a short coat of cream guipure with a vest of mauve-shot chiffon, very stylish, as the shop labels say; a black straw with coloured roses and violets. Her hair was fringed above the forehead and coiled in rings and a knot at the back of her head.

Mrs. Grass could not afford to dress as well as Emmie, but she was very neat and felt quite pleased to be out with her beautiful and elegant niece.

People on the pier were walking up and down in long lines, as if promenading after dinner was a rite.

Mrs. Grass said: "Shall we go inside and hear the band, or shall we stay here?"

Emmie thought: He said it was a good programme and just as swiftly, what a silly thing she was!

"I don't mind," she said, leaving it an open question.

Mrs. Holten or Miss Booke would promptly have decided what to do: they liked making up their minds, particularly when it meant the making up of other people's also.

Mrs. Grass hesitated.

"It's a lovely evening," she said.

"Yes," said Emmie, thinking, I wonder if he'll come here. . . . He might. "Let's walk up and down," she said quickly, really out of a sort of impatience with herself for having such thoughts.

"Yes," said Mrs. Grass agreeably, "we can go and hear a concert when it's wet. And I like watching the people, don't you, Emmie?"

"Yes."

They were sitting at the side of the pier watching the people mostly, but turning every now and then to look at the waves which swung along beneath them to be shattered into foam farther up the beach, when Emmie, who had been seeing with noteworthy frequency a man with bold blue eyes and fine shoulders come through the crowd (to be disappointed — or wrong, at any rate), suddenly saw him actually. He was here. It was he. He was looking about, too. Emmie did not catch his eye, but she saw its roving look and wondered if he really were desirous of seeing her. . . . How funny. . . . It wasn't funny at all. . . . Well, but a widow with two children. . . . At any rate, she determined he should

come up if he wished to do so without encouragement from her.

She looked over the pier.

"Doesn't it look deep and terrible?" she said to Mrs. Grass.

"It terrifies me sometimes. I keep wondering what I should do if I fell in. . . . Just look at that big wave."

But Emmie had almost lost interest in the fascinating sea. She was saying to herself: He ought to be here now . . . he ought to be behind us — if he meant coming — *and saw us*. . . . What a fool she was, she thought! What in the world did she turn her back on the man for? There was no sense in that. He might not see her at all and go past. . . . And in any case why shouldn't she look at him? . . .

"Yes," she said dreamily, in reply to Mrs. Grass, and turned round.

Her heart gave a leap. Good Heavens! What's the matter with me! she thought, and colour came into her face which made her call herself other names.

The gentleman with the blue eyes and fine shoulders and sandy moustache was smoking a cigar and standing near her.

He raised his straw hat slightly, took his cigar out of his mouth and said: "You didn't like to go inside this beautiful night?"

"No," replied Emmie.

CHAPTER XX

WHEN Mrs. Grass turned round to see who it was talking to Emmie, she recognised the gentleman from "The Towers" and responded to his bow.

"I think you have chosen the better part," he said to her. "The concert-room can get very stuffy."

"Just what I thought," said Mrs. Grass. "And it's so beautiful out here. I always like sitting on the pier."

"Very refreshing. But the sea always is: one never tires of it."

"I suppose you've seen a lot of it," said Emmie, who thought that as he was there and was talking to them, she might as well see what he was made of.

He moved a little depreciatingly.

"A bit," he said.

"You've been to Australia," she said.

"Yes — three or four times."

"Three or four times. . . ." That was astonishing. Emmie could not even say that about the Isle of Man. She looked her surprise. "I should think you have seen a bit of the sea," she said, speaking in a challenging way, as if she were on good terms with him and could indulge in friendly raillery.

He laughed.

Mrs. Grass looked him up and down and tried to take his full measure. Emmie was wondering what kind of a man he was . . . and what did he think about her. He was certainly gentlemanly.

"I suppose you've been on business?" said Mrs. Grass, who could ask direct questions when she chose, and liked to glean personal information.

"Yes. I've been in the East for three years, and only got back a month ago."

"In the East. . . ." There was glamour in the word.

Emmie looked up. "What, er . . . what part?"

"Japan, China, Java — the whole of the Archipelago."

Both the ladies were impressed.

"Wouldn't you like to walk a bit, Emmie?" said Mrs. Grass, rising.

"Yes, Aunt Sophia," said Emmie, and Mrs. Grass was shrewd enough to guess that Emmie had said "Aunt Sophia" to let this gentleman know the relationship that existed between them.

Emmie also guessed that her aunt had guessed and did not care.

The gentleman saw that "Aunt Sophia" had not meant to dismiss him, and Emmie made sure he did see it, for she said to him as she rose: "Isn't it unhealthy in those parts?"

He ranged himself on her side so that Emmie was between him and Aunt Sophia.

"Not if you take care," he said. And he then began to talk of his travels. He did it easily and not at all like a lecturer. He would be reminded as it were of places and incidents and anecdotes and Mrs. Grass kept saying to herself, "What a charming man! What delightful talks!"

And Emmie looked at him critically — boots, neat and smart, patent with brown tops, a black lounge coat with grey trousers, a black tie, fine pearl pin, straw hat, gold ring on little finger — seal ring, gold headed cane. . . . What was he? Travelled on business as far as Australia. . . . Been there three or four times. . . .

If Aunt Sophia weren't here and she — Emmie —were

alone with him. . . . Well, she was amazed at her own ideas! What in the world possessed her?

Was it the sea-air, or the change . . . . or the sight of all those young men and girls walking with or after one another? There was no denying that the sea-side attracted the sexes. Emmie saw the pleasure on the faces of men and maidens. She saw the eagerness on others. It was one great stream of sex attraction save for the too young or too old, or the married: and even some of the married. . . .

Emmie said to herself she hadn't felt like this since Tim died. Was this man no more interested in her than in any other woman he could talk to in Blackpool? Was she imagining things? . . .

And she heard him saying:

"Yes. I've been days sometimes without speaking to a soul — having a chat that is."

Mrs. Grass sympathised.

Emmie said daringly: "And I should think you like talking."

Mrs. Grass said: "Emmie!"

The gentleman laughed.

"Am I talking too much?"

"Not at all," said Emmie quietly. "I only thought you er — well, you talked very well."

"Flatterer," he said, giving her a look with his bold blue eyes.

"I don't flatter," said Emmie quietly, trying to stare at him coldly, but her eyes had fire in them and she had a most captivating way of using them that a little neglect had not wholly smothered.

"Then I am even more honoured than I thought," he said.

They strolled up and down the pier, keeping a slow

even step like the rest of the promenaders. After a while Mrs. Grass said: "Isn't it time to go in?"

"Getting tired?" asked Emmie.

"No. No!" said Mrs. Grass, who did not wish to mark age like that, but was tired all the same. "But it doesn't do to overdo it the first day. Don't let us take you back Mr. . . ."

"Tame. T-A-M-E," he said. "Oh! if you don't mind I'll go back with you. I only came for a little stroll."

So they turned back together.

When Emmie was alone in her room that night she locked the door and looked at herself in the glass.

Tame . . . T-A-M-E . . . It was queer, she thought.

Now what — well, she was surely good enough looking to attract a man. She was well dressed (well-to-do also for that matter), and well favoured even though she herself said it.

He was a gentleman, too. . . . Suppose he . . . had taken a fancy to her. . . . Just suppose it . . . well, why not?

Emmie bit her lip. Tim dead but three years. . . . Yes, but she was alive, and only thirty years of age. Oh! what was the good of bothering about such things? She had come to Blackpool for a holiday, and here she was . . . yes, here she was thinking of a man with wavy hair — it had a wave at the side where he brushed it. And he had a fine nose and chin. And he was well set up, too . . . he could take a woman in his arms. . . .

She took her hat off, gave it a little shake, and then began to undress.

When she let her hair down and began to brush it she said to herself: And why shouldn't I marry again

if I want to? I . . . I . . . she presses her lips together tightly as if she were struggling with herself. She stood up in front of the glass and let her hair hang over her shoulders. It fell on her breast and Emmie looked superlatively hungry for life. The blood was coursing warm through her veins.

Why shouldn't I marry again if I want to? she asked herself. She threw her hair back and shook her head . . . she noticed how finely her neck was moulded to her head and chest. Her figure was excellent. At thirty — yes, why should she not marry again if she wished?

She was perhaps thinking of a lot of nonsense but Mr. Tame with those blue eyes. . . . Her breast heaved. She took up the brush again and used it vigorously on her hair.

Marry again, and the man had not even said a word. She had only seen him for the first time a few hours ago; it was preposterous. . . . It was nothing of the kind, something inside her said. What was the good of arguing about this and that and talking about only having seen him a few hours when she *felt things?* You couldn't argue that away if you talked till you were blue in the face. That look in his eyes . . . but it was nonsense in a way all the same. . . .

Emmie banished him from her fancy for the moment. She undressed, jumped into bed, tucked the clothes all round her — and began to see the face of Mr. Tame again and to hear his voice. . . .

In the morning when she got up, Emmie was at first inclined to say to herself she had been very silly the night before, imagining such things. . . . Lots of women fancied things if a man looked at them and felt all the time it wasn't mere fancy, it was something . . . they

knew . . . other people would probably scoff, but they *knew* — and it turned out to be sheer nonsense!

And Emmie said to herself she was not going to be like that. All the same she felt she *knew*. . . .

She had sufficient self control, however, to be able to think coldly of things. She effectively thrust Mr. Tame from her thoughts while she dressed (which she did carefully) and while she visited the children.

Tim and Alice were both dressed and Ada was also looking very clean and smart, having, under Emmie's guidance, provided herself with clean blouses for the holiday as well as new boots and skirt.

Tim shouted that he was going on the sands after breakfast and Emmie said he should go immediately after and Alice added, "'mejatly after breakfast." They all looked very well and Emmie felt rather proud of her family. Tim in his sailor suit stood up well and was a manly little fellow, while Alice gave promise of inheriting her mother's beauty, and always attracted attention with her striking colouring.

Emmie went downstairs with the children and saw groups of "guests" standing or sitting about the hall and the lounge, while some were walking outside, breathing in the fresh sea air and hoping to do full duty to the breakfast, for which they rather impatiently waited.

Emmie created an impression amongst these waiting people the moment she appeared. Some of the wrinkled men continued to read their papers, but the women were all alert. Feminine beauty has its attraction for women of any age, and this striking brunette with the beautifully rounded face and fine figure caught their attention at once.

The men noted her, too, but they could not be so persistently curious and critical as the ladies. Theirs was

a sort of "Fine woman!" and a resumption of the paper. The women looked Emmie up and down from hair to heel. They looked to see if her hair was false or dyed or her bust was padded — and to enjoy her beauty.

Mr. Tame came from somewhere, Emmie didn't know where. She was standing at the door, hatless, in a white blouse with bits of red shot in round the neck and the wristbands and down the front, and a dark blue skirt. Tim and Alice in sailor suits stood beside her and looked out on the sea whose waves broke upon the beach in front of them and sent up its note of restless ardour.

Mr. Tame had no hat on but was dressed in knickers — a brown suit, showing his shapely legs and figure to advantage.

Emmie was pleased to be noticed, especially by this handsome man and before those gazing feminine eyes, too.

He smiled and nodded.

"The children are evidently going to make the most of it," he said, and turning to Alice he touched her cheek and asked in a wonderful whisper: "Going to dig for gold?"

Alice screwed herself up and smiled. Digging for gold . . . it was like digging for fairies.

Tim pushed forward.

"Can we?" he asked eagerly.

"Dig for gold?"

"Yes."

"You can dig, but," he shook his head. "I don't think you'll get any here — by digging at any rate."

"We're going to make a castle," said Tim.

"Yes, an' put water in it," said Alice.

"Mother going to dig, too?" he asked, looking at

Emmie who found herself clearly caught interested in his person.

"I don't suppose I shall dig," she said, "but I am going on the sands with them."

He volunteered the information that he was going to play golf, had a match fixed up with a man. . . . Emmie associated golf with knickers or a red coat and knew little else about it for there were no links at Ganton then and none of her friends seemed to be votaries of the game. The Bookes followed cricket and football and played bowls.

Mrs. Grass came down. She nodded to Emmie — there was no special greeting and nodded a trifle more elaborately to Mr. Tame.

"I thought I was going to be late," she said.

"They give us a little license in the morning," he replied.

As the two spoke Emmie felt he is talking here for my sake. . . . I wonder what it means. . . . I wish I knew a lot more about him. . . .

Then the gong went for breakfast and everybody seemed relieved and pleased and tried not to appear too anxious to dash towards the dining room till a few callous creatures went ahead and then there was almost a crush to the doorway.

Mrs. Grass and Emmie and the children quite enjoyed the breakfast: they looked round a good deal to glance at people and Emmie was not sure whether she was glad or sorry she could not see Mr. Tame. He could see her, but she had to turn round to see him and when she did turn round once their eyes met and she turned quickly towards her own table and did not try to see him again during that meal.

After breakfast when she was dressed and ready to go

with Ada and the children and waited for Mrs. Grass, Mr. Tame came out carrying on his back a — to Emmie — curious leather bag with odd looking things inside, "what one played golf with," Emmie imagined.

He raised his hat.

"Won't you wish me luck?" he said as he was passing.

Emmie hesitated. This gentleman had a superb way with him. "Oh, yes," she said, trying to treat the request as of no more than a polite phrase. "I don't know that it will do you any good though."

"One never knows," he said, shaking his head. "I have to give him a couple of strokes, but I'll try to bring back his scalp now you back me. I hope you'll build a gorgeous castle on the sands and defy the sea and all its waves." He stroked Tim's face. "And what are you going to do?" he bent down before Alice.

"Dig," she said quickly.

He looked very solemn.

"Dig a great big hole and then get the sea in your bucket and pour it in — then we shall be able to walk to America."

He kissed her.

Alice looked amazed — not at the kiss, but at the idea of putting the sea in a hole so that she could walk to America . . . wouldn't that be splendid? . . .

Mr. Tame smiled at Emmie, not with any particular message — just pleasantly, but very pleasantly, turned and walked away.

Emmie caught herself watching him walk along the promenade for quite a long distance. What a fine, handsome man he was! . . .

Alice said: "Mammy, can I put the sea in a hole and then we can walk to America?"

"No, silly," said Tim quickly.

Alice looked hurt.

"The gentleman said it," she retorted defensively.

"You can't put the sea in a hole — *you* can't at any rate. Look what a lot there is. And besides it runs out as fast as you put it in when the hole's full, doesn't it, Mother? . . . Is America far, Mother?"

"Too far to walk to, dear," said Emmie, thinking of Mr. Tame's delightful fancies. How charming in an easy quiet way he was with the children!

Till lunch Emmie sat on the sands with Aunt Sophia, while the children dug and Ada assisted and watched.

Mrs. Grass and Emmie discussed all kinds of topics, including Mr. Tame. Mrs. Grass liked the look of Mr. Tame but was just a trifle curious about his clear interest in them: he had talked to them after dinner last night, joined them on the pier (after encouraging them to go there. . . . Mrs. Grass nodded her head significantly as she thought of this, considering too, she was really very smart and shrewd to have noted it all . . . but told herself approvingly she was no fool . . .) and been pleasant and affable again this morning. What did it mean? Just pleasantness? or Emmie? . . . Emmie . . . The idea was disturbing. Did Emmie notice the gentleman? Would she? And if she did . . . Mrs. Grass was not altogether at rest as she thought of this. She was perturbed. She was not jealous, but there was something about the idea that displeased her faintly.

She tried bait.

"Very nice gentleman that Mr. Tame," she said.

"Yes," replied Emmie, going on with her crocheting so that Aunt Sophia tried a glance at her face and gleaned nothing reliable.

"Very polite, isn't he? You can tell he doesn't come from about here or else he's travelled a lot."

Emmie paused.

"He has travelled," she said, not wishing to be too indifferent or too self-conscious.

"I wonder what he does now? . . . Some of those smooth-tongued people . . ." she shook her head. She really felt she ought to utter a word of warning for, after all, "you never knew." "And I expect queer people get into these boarding-houses at times."

"Oh, yes," said Emmie. "Rum lot some of 'em I'll bet." It was uttered jovially as if Emmie would cover up her thoughts with dashingness.

Aunt Sophia was a little reassured.

Emmie thought: Trying to probe me, Auntie . . . You won't get much out of me.

And she went on with her fine crocheting as if she were thinking of nothing so seriously as of that at present. She held it out in her hand and gazed at it.

Aunt Sophia looked at it. "Very nice, Emmie. . . . What is it, a doyley?"

"No. It's a collar for Alice."

"Very pretty."

Aunt Sophia found it difficult to return to the subject of Mr. Tame without exciting suspicion.

The sun warmed them, the gentle breeze that blew over the sea soothed and invigorated them: they got sand in and about their clothes but they were satisfied at lunch time they had behaved quite well and done their duty to the children, to themselves, to the holiday and to the sea, and as they walked back to "The Towers" Emmie was thinking of a man in a brown suit with shapely legs and saying to herself, "I wonder if he will be back for lunch. . . ."

Mr. Tame was not in for lunch, but he was there for tea.

Emmie caught sight of him as she entered the lounge where tea was served. She heard him say . . . "good links like most of these sand courses" and didn't understand. He turned as she came in almost as if he were expecting some one and smiled quietly. He seemed to drift towards her, for his coming to her was not ostentatious.

"Did you have a good dig?" he asked with a twinkle in his eye.

"The family did," said Emmie. "Did you have any luck?"

"Three up and one. . . . I knew you'd give me luck," he added in a lower note — a more confidential one.

Emmie was calm.

"I don't know what three up and one means: it sounds like a riddle."

He laughed.

"By the by," he said. "They are playing 'The Prisoner of Zenda' at the theatre to-night. I can get a couple of tickets. Would you care to go, Mrs. Booke?"

Emmie hesitated. A couple of tickets . . . did he mean for himself and her? or for Aunt Sophia and her? And Mrs. Booke — he's got her name, too, for when he told them his last night he had not asked theirs, nor had they volunteered the information.

She looked willingness.

"I don't know . . ." she said. "I am with my aunt. I don't care about leaving her."

He was eyeing her in tell-tale fashion.

Emmie felt the something-not-to-be-easily-defined behind the looks, but was calm.

"She wouldn't mind," he suggested.

Emmie hesitated between desire and a host of other things — prudence; it didn't do to be too eager, rash even: and what would Aunt Sophia say? and, er. . . .

"We've only just come: it seems a pity to leave her the first day. Thank you very much, and it's very kind of you."

"Not at all. Suppose I got three tickets — I could get another I think, would you and your aunt come? I can easily get another."

Emmie said something about him being very kind and taking all that trouble and er . . . when Mrs. Grass joined them.

Mr. Tame turned to her at once.

"The very lady," he said cheerily. "I can get three tickets for the theatre to-night — it's 'The Prisoner of Zenda,' and I was just asking Mrs. Booke if you and she would care to go."

Mrs. Grass looked agreeably surprised and yet hesitated. She could not accept an invitation like that without some show of embarrassment. She turned to Emmie and a good many thoughts flitted through her mind.

Emmie was obviously for yes. Mrs. Grass saw that.

"It's very kind of you, Mr. Tame," she muttered. "I don't know . . ." She was slowly trying to make up her mind and wished she could have talked over the invitation with Emmie for five minutes.

"It is no kindness on my part. . . . I think you'll like it. The piece has been a great success in London — George Alexander produced it." He talked as if they had agreed to go and both Emmie and Aunt Sophia felt they could not now refuse. They were definitely booked to go to the theatre with this attractive gentleman, and both of them were finding reasons why he had asked them.

Mrs. Grass said to Emmie when they were together in her room: "Mr. Tame has taken a fancy to one of us."

"Perhaps it's both of us," said Emmie.

"Not much," retorted Mrs. Grass. "But don't you let him go too far, Emmie: you've got two children, you know."

"Oh! I can take care of myself," said Emmie with a laugh, for she did not want to argue with Aunt Sophia.

"He's a dangerous man is that Mr. Tame, one of those fascinating men, you know. I wonder if we really ought to go. I'm half sorry we let him think we'd go."

Emmie laughed. Her spirits were high, though she checked the outpouring of them.

"What else could you do? He won't eat us, and you know you'll enjoy the piece."

"Oh, yes . . . but I'm thinking of something else. . . . How long has Tim been dead, Emmie — two years, is it?"

"Three — over three," said Emmie.

"How time flies! It didn't seem so long as that to me."

CHAPTER XXI

WHEN Emmie was in her room at night after the theatre she was disturbed with many thoughts. The play had been most enjoyable, but Mr. Tame dominated Black Michael and Rudolph Rassendall. He had in general behaved charmingly, but there was more than ordinary or even extraordinary courtesy in his behaviour, courtesy was not the word. Those looks he gave her. . . . Emmie caught him once or twice looking at her and he boldly continued. He managed to invest his gaze with homage. Emmie knew what it meant and so thoroughly enjoyed it that she delayed overlong in trying to make it a matter of indifference by whispering, "A splendid play, isn't it?"

He just nodded, managing in rather a clever fashion to let her see quite plainly that for him there were other splendours beside plays.

And now Emmie in her room, luxuriated in the power she possessed to influence such a man as Mr. Tame. It made her very glad. She was a widow with two children, and the moment she appeared before this man — and he was no insignificant person either — he seemed to have . . . fallen in love with her. Was he in love with her?

Emmie looked at herself. Not a grey hair — not one, black through and through and plenty of it, too. . . . She had no need of pads and transformations and buns. And those eyes were all right — nothing the matter with them . . . or the lashes . . . and the rest of the face . . . and there was something behind the face, too.

Suppose he was really in love with her. . . . What should she do? Did she want to marry again?

She clasped her hands. Why not? She was young enough. What was thirty? If Tim could have given her a message, she knew he would have told her to marry again if she wished. It was absurd to think she must never have anything to do with a man again just because she had had a husband for six years. She was a jolly sight fitter for marriage than some of these madcap, scraggy creatures she saw walking about hunting for husbands. . . .

A man beside her again. . . . Her bosom rose and fell. And what would people in Ganton say if she married again? The Bookes. . . . Well, even Aunt Sophia would raise up her hands against it. . . . There were the children. . . . The children counted. Tim and Alice must be thought of. In any case she would never marry any man who wouldn't be good to them.

She began to undress.

But he was a nice man, those eyes of his, and his voice. . . . She sighed. A man like that could marry almost any woman, and he looked at her.

Did he mean it really? . . . It would be lovely to have a man beside her again. Some one she could look after and who would be a regular man and make her proud of him, a gentleman. He would have to be a gentleman or somebody out of the common this time.

But it would probably all end in nothing. She didn't suppose she'd marry again. . . . The children in any case must be thought of. . . . But coming to that place and almost at once the most distinguished gentleman in the house made up to her. . . . She felt superlatively pleased. She wanted all her women friends to know. If she did

marry again — and a gentleman too — they *would* stare in Ganton.

When she came down to breakfast the following morning she saw Mr. Tame talking to the children again. Her heart beat a little faster. The picture seemed an omen. He came towards her, Tim on one side and Alice on the other, with almost a challenging air. It was as if he said, "Well how do you like the idea? Don't we look a happy family?"

Emmie thought him very handsome this morning and his smile had a peculiarly intimate and steady expression in it.

"Good morning," he said. "I hope you feel no worse for your dissipation last night."

"I didn't know I was dissipated," she said. "In any case I feel no worse for it."

"That's reassuring. I have just been invited by your son to visit your hat works."

Emmie turned her gaze from Mr. Tame to Tim. If he came to Ganton . . .

"The mother," he said quietly, "does not endorse the invitation."

"I do," said Emmie quickly but quietly, "if you'd like to see over a hat works you can see over mine with pleasure."

"It would be a pleasure," he said.

Emmie thought his tone dangerous. "He's in love with me," she said to herself, and was thrilled and a little frightened. His tone was homage.

"Come any time you like," she said.

"Thank you. . . . I shall come," he said, managing to import into the speech a fine wealth of suggestion.

Then, as if he had delivered a message, he turned to the children who held his hands confidently.

"Going to dig a tunnel from here to Ireland to-day?" he asked.

Alice looked at him wonderingly.

"A tunnel!" she replied, thinking of the dash of a train in a dark hole.

Tim said, "We can't."

"Why not?"

"We can't."

"Why not?"

"Well, we can't."

Emmie laughed.

"So that ends it," she said to Mr. Tame.

"The Channel scheme wrecked," he said. "Are you going to sit on the sand again this morning and listen to what the wild waves are saying?"

"Probably. I haven't seen my aunt yet. If not the sands it will be somewhere else."

"Have you ever killed an elephant?" Tim suddenly asked.

"No, but I've ridden on one."

"Have you?"

"Ridden on an elephant's back?" asked Alice.

He nodded "Um."

"Where?" asked Tim.

"At Belle Vue."

Tim and Alice emitted sounds of disgust and Tim actually thumped him. Emmie smiled. She felt very comfortable with him somehow and allowed herself to think of them as a family group. . . .

"Are you going to make a long stay here?" he asked.

"About a fortnight."

"Providence is kind," he said.

Emmie hesitated but could not resist the "Why."

"I hope to stay about another fortnight myself," he said.

And then Emmie shot at him one of those probing, most alluring glances as if, when it was a matter of sex, she had to use her eyes in this particular way.

He looked at her keenly, and understood her.

He was rather quick to read women in certain directions.

Then Aunt Sophia came and of course noted Mr. Tame and Emmie, the looks on their faces and the attitudes of the children.

"Waiting for the gong," she said, but at once added to Emmie, "Your Aunt Jane and Aunt Maria will be here to-day. I've just had a letter."

Emmie said, "Oh, what time?"

And Mr. Tame wondered if Aunt Jane and Aunt Maria would be of any use to him.

He managed to get near to Emmie after breakfast and somehow the conversation slipped from the weather and Blackpool and visitors and things in general to personal affairs. So she had a hat factory . . . rather remarkable for a lady and one so young and beautiful . . . to be the head of a big business.

He looked at her with sincerity in his eyes as he spoke, and let her see he was not employing his pleasing phrases as mere flattery.

At least, that was how Emmie took them, though the average woman on being told she is beautiful if she is reasonably good-looking will invariably take the remark as a frank spontaneous expression of honest feeling.

And she explained how it was she was the possessor of T. Booke & Son — not telling she had been a trimmer,

merely that her husband had died and left her everything.

He said she was an amazing woman, talked of her pluck in keeping an eye on the business, instead of getting rid of it or leaving it entirely in somebody else's hands.

He talked of himself a little. He had travelled for firms whose names were household words and had now a fine knowledge of the East and its markets, and hoped to set up with another man as a merchant: there were thousands to be made out of the Eastern trade if it were only tackled by the right people in the right way.

He wanted to stay at home now and let others do the travelling. It was time he settled down. He felt that more and more every day. He wanted a nice home and a wife. . . .

They were now strolling along the front, for he had lured her to the gate and deftly led her on to the promenade.

As he talked of a wife Emmie said to herself, "Good gracious! I hope he's not going to propose here." She was excited and while thoroughly enjoying his attitude, yet did not wish to be made uncomfortable.

"Well, you ought to find your chance here with all these eligible girls about," said Emmie.

He looked at her.

"I think that's true," he said. "There are certainly a lot of very nice people here," but he looked at her as if that was not the thing that was in his mind.

Emmie suddenly turned.

"I must go back," she said. "They'll wonder what has become of me."

He touched her arm.

"Does it matter?" he said.

"Oh, yes."

"You are always with your aunt," he said it as a pleasant reproach.

"Well, I came with her."

"That's not a reason — Wouldn't you care to go a little excursion with me some afternoon?"

She hesitated.

"I don't know. . . . I have the children and er . . ."

"Your aunt," he said.

She laughed.

"Well, I can't leave her alone."

"And now I overheard — I couldn't help it — that more aunts are arriving: will that liberate you a little, or shall you be bound with still greener withs?"

Emmie did not understand the allusion to withs but grasped the sense.

"I don't know. . . . If you want a companion you'll have no difficulty in finding one," she said, as if she would exploit the situation just a little.

"No," he said calmly. "If I only wanted a companion I don't think I should find any difficulty."

Emmie looked at him and felt grateful for his attitude.

She wanted to be sympathetic, also she wanted to go on an excursion with him. She was beginning to feel he had a real influence over her and as she saw couples in the heyday of youth and vigour going past, she felt desirous of being one with them. She, too, was capable of living a full life with a mate, why should she be doomed to everlasting widowhood?

And he . . . he was certainly out of the common. . . .

"You're very kind," she said, "but I can't promise; it's difficult, you see."

"Could you manage a theatre? Would you care to come?"

"I . . . Suppose we leave it. My aunts will be here

to-day and they may want to do things — perhaps in a day or two. . . ."

"All right. I hope I am not worrying you," he took her arm and pressed it as he guided her across the road.

She felt a thrill go through her. A man's touch again. . . . Why should she bother about her aunts? Were they going to tell her when she must go to the theatre and when she mustn't?

"Oh! No," she said. "I must hurry back."

"Suppose I came and digged with you."

"I'm not going to-day."

"Well, sewed then?"

"If you'll bring your sewing you can sit beside me," she said, and they both felt as if they were on really good and promising terms with each other.

Mrs. Grass at the gate looked serious. She wondered what was really going on . . . Emma and that Mr. Tame again. . . . She was glad Jane and Maria were coming.

"The children have gone," she said, as Emmie entered the house.

"Really I ——"

"My fault," said Mr. Tame. "I think I'd better go after them and show them how to dig a big hole so that all the clocks can be efficiently buried. I wonder what we should feel like if we had no clocks or watches. . . ."

Mrs. Grass thought, "What a talker he is!" She said, "It would be awkward about dinner time."

He laughed merrily.

Emmie said, "I'll be down in a minute," and ran upstairs jauntily for her hat and sewing.

As Aunt Sophia and Emmie sat on the sands again while the children constructed castles and moats and tunnels they both had thoughts they didn't think it worth

while to express. Mrs. Grass thought of Emmie and Mr. Tame and disapproved. It may have been a little jealousy or a regard for the family or a certain intuition that Jane and Maria would be put out when they knew! . . .

Emmie's principal thoughts circled round the question: "Why shouldn't I?" She would look at Tim and Alice and say, "They would be no worse off for a father . . . a gentleman too like Mr. Tame. . . . And then she and he would fill the picture alone. Thirty that was all she was . . . of course people would talk and say things — they always did and would, but what did that matter?

When he took her arm she could have kissed him . . . and she had money enough surely. . . .

In the afternoon Mrs. Holten and Miss Booke arrived.

Emmie and Mrs. Grass went to meet them and Emmie noted at once something taut in the atmosphere. Both the ladies kissed her and asked after the children, but there was something that suggested a veil hanging between their attitudes and that of frank cordiality.

Emmie said quickly, "Aunt Sophia's told them, written to them"— to herself of course.

She felt a little intimidated and also provoked. The three of them had a pull in the matter of numbers.

First there was gossip of no value except as a prelude.

"Well," said Mrs. Holten, "and have you made any friends?"

Mrs. Grass said, "No — not in a manner of speaking. We've certainly made an impression on one gentleman."

"Gentleman . . . what . . ."

"Perhaps I shouldn't say we — I ought to say Emmie."

Mrs. Grass smiled at Emmie and nodded as if she were most innocently intentioned.

"There's always men at a boarding house that . . ." Mrs. Holten nodded. "I credit Emmie with a bit of sense at any rate."

"I must say he's behaved very nicely," said Mrs. Grass. "He took us to the theatre one night."

"Took you to the theatre? . . ."

"Who paid?" asked Miss Booke quickly.

"He did," said Mrs. Grass.

"He did . . ." said Miss Booke looking — or endeavouring to look — agonised.

Mrs. Holten said, "Well, Sophia, I don't know how you could accept something from a stranger like that — good seats too, I expect."

Emmie said to herself: "They are talking like this for me."

Mrs. Grass assumed an apologetic air: "It sounded as if he got the tickets for nothing, didn't it, Emmie?"

"I thought he did."

"In that case," said Mrs. Holten, "it wasn't so bad, but I don't believe in accepting favours from strangers myself. if you don't know who they are. . . . It's very risky."

"Very risky," added Miss Booke with heat. "A perfect stranger, I suppose — till you came here."

"I should drop him I think," said Mrs. Holten. "If he asks you as soon as that to go to a theatre, he's . . ." she nodded, "well, it's not my style to go to the theatre with the first stranger that asks me. I'd pay for myself or not go. And what's more, you wouldn't find me going with the first man who came up and asked me, boarding-house or not."

"Never heard such a thing," said Miss Booke.

Emmie felt her blood getting very warm.

Mrs. Grass said: "It didn't seem as bad as that when he asked us, did it, Emmie?"

Emmie smiled, rather more heroically than joyfully.

Mrs. Holten was watching her keenly.

"I should like to see this man that's so free with his theatre tickets to ladies he hasn't known more than twenty-four hours," said Miss Booke.

Emmie was working her toes in her shoes furiously. "Just imagine them making this fuss over a visit to the theatre," she said to herself.

Then somehow the conversation was suddenly switched off to a bit of Ganton gossip and the talk was quite agreeable till dinner time. The ladies went a little walk, for when you were at the seaside it was your duty to be out in the fresh air as much as possible.

At dinner Mrs. Holten and Miss Booke eyed Mr. Tame with cold, steely, penetrating looks. He saw them and remarked to himself that he was an object of observation, and had evidently been talked about and that therefore he might take hopeful views. . . .

After dinner he made his way towards Emmie and Miss Booke who were standing together.

He talked about an accident that had happened to a sailing boat, by which a man had lost his life, but Miss Booke refused to join in the conversation.

So Emmie introduced him.

"My aunt, Miss Booke — Mr. Tame."

Miss Booke's bow was so dignified as to be icy.

He ventured an agreeably toned remark about the weather.

"Yes," she replied with a cold snap, gazing out to sea.

Emmie felt as if a wave of something frigid and then hot rolled down her back.

Mr. Tame seemed to ignore it. He turned to Emmie and said quietly: "I wonder how many people in the course of the year pass through a place like this?"

Emmie felt very grateful to him for taking the snub so well. "And what unexpected things!" he said.

Mrs. Holten came up and said, "I suppose you are going out."

"Certainly," said Miss Booke. "Come along, Emmie, we'll get ready." She quite ignored Mr. Tame, who smiled at Emmie. "It's a glorious night," he said.

Emmie felt as if she could kiss him. What a gentleman!

Mrs. Holten could be tactful with her masterfulness, Miss Booke could not. She imagined you had to hammer away at people if you wished them to do or not to do certain things — that is how she acted: she really had no imagination: when she wanted a thing done she simply said so and could delude herself with the idea that she was devoted to duty, was frankly honest and outspoken and put the welfare of others before their regard for her. Her emotions were quickly roused and as she had courage and vitality she was an uncomfortable person to have as a friend. As an aunt Emmie found her at times almost unbearable.

Mrs. Grass was companionable but could not fight her stronger willed sisters.

Emmie was always willing to pay them some respect for Tim's sake. They were his father's sisters: they were Bookes and she had inherited T. Booke & Son. Besides she had worked as a trimmer in the hat factory and had naturally during that time considered all the members of the Booke family as persons of importance. These early ideas were not got rid of in the twinkling of an eye. Emmie by now could hold her own but she

could not attack without some uneasiness and she generally kept a firm hand on herself in her dealings with Mrs. Holten and Miss Booke.

It was quite in the expected order of things that Miss Booke having seen Mr. Tame and spoken with him, should wish to say something about him.

Emmie felt Aunt Maria was about to burst forth. Her mouth twitched, she gave her head little shakes, she lost her step now and then as they walked; she seemed to exude a nervous aura.

Mrs. Holten and Mrs. Grass were in front and Miss Booke bottled up her feelings till they could be completely appreciated and well backed up.

They all went on the pier: it was cheap, healthy and pleasant.

Mrs. Holten marched like a leader. She could never lose herself wholly in observation in a crowd for every now and then she reminded herself that she had a reputation or position or something important to keep up and was as deserving of observation as most of them; and then would follow a noteworthy stiffening of the body and a fine, strong photographic expression on the face.

"We'll sit down a bit," she said, when they reached the end of the pier. They were barely settled down in a quiet corner when Miss Booke said:

"I suppose that was the gentleman, Emmie, you introduced me to, who took you to the theatre?"

"Lord: she's at it," said Emmie to herself. "Yes," she said calmly to her aunt.

"Well, I don't think much of him," said Miss Booke quickly and confidently, "did you see him, Jane?"

Mrs. Holten hesitated. She did not want Emmie to think she had been paying too much attention to the gentleman.

"Yes," she replied almost casually, but with definiteness for those who knew her.

"What did you think of him?"

"Oh! . . . Collar and cuffs."

Emmie winced: she was being flagellated within the meaning of the term discretion as understood by her aunts.

"And worse. . . . That man"—she nodded with voluminous suggestiveness. "Well, I wouldn't trust a girl of mine with him."

Emmie kept silent; she knew her own power in a battle royal and also the advantage of the unspoken word.

"Oh—h. . . . Did you think that, Maria?" asked Mrs. Grass who had to think of herself a little, but wished at this particular moment to soothe matters.

"I shouldn't have said it if I didn't," said Miss Booke sharply. "I'm surprised at you, Sophia, taking on with a man like that. Emmie's younger. . . ."

"There's always a danger," said Mrs. Holten, speaking with authority and weight, "of meeting undesirable people at these boarding houses. You can't help it, of course, and there are nice people there too: but then these, what shall I say?—these dangerous people come there too. The only thing is to keep your eyes open and give them a wide berth."

"I should think so indeed," added Miss Booke. "I should give that Mr. Tame, or whatever his name is, a wide enough berth."

There was a silence.

"Did you hear, Emmie?" asked Miss Booke.

Emmie feeling indignant said curtly, "I did."

Mrs. Holten looked at her quickly to read her attitude.

Mrs. Grass said to herself, "Oh, dear me, they're at

her again — more rows —" She just stirred on her seat and said nothing.

Miss Booke drew herself up like a rattlesnake that has been pricked.

"Well," she said, "and I hope you'll take warning."

"I'm old enough," said Emmie tartly, "to take care of myself without warnings."

"Oh! *that's* it, is it," said Miss Booke, signifying something ominous, subtle and vague.

"That's what?" said Emmie quickly, looking a little flushed.

"I should think you could understand that without asking. Do you mean to say you're going on carrying on with that man ——"

"Carrying on with a man?" said Emmie.

"Hush! Sh! . . ." said Mrs. Holten. "Emmie!" she spoke authoritatively, "don't talk so loud."

Miss Booke sniffed. "You married well enough once," she said; "isn't that enough for you?"

Not talk so loud — Emmie wanted to shriek. Words would only come in a volume in reply to this.

"Well!" she trembled and was on the brink of tears.

"Oh! let's be quiet now — in this place," said Mrs. Grass, looking round anxiously to see if they were observed at all.

Miss Booke had the attitude of the austere creature who must do her duty regardless of time, place, circumstance and almost any mundane consideration.

"Emmie," said Mrs. Holten, "you must see you ought to be careful in your dealings with a man who is a stranger to you. You've got two children to bring up. A person in your position can't go gadding about with a man: it isn't seemly: it isn't proper. You don't mean anything serious — you can't of course in your position

and with those two children of yours. But you'll get talked about if you're not careful. And that affects us — you are Mrs. Booke, remember!"

"Yes," snapped Miss Booke, "you're not Emmie Bollins now."

Emmie got up, she looked as if she were about to say something heated, but suddenly changed her mind and said: "I'm going home."

She had only got a stride away when Mrs. Grass caught hold of her. "Emmie, Emmie," she said, "before all these people. Come back."

Emmie's tears were welling about her eyes.

"I'm only saying things for Emmie's good," said Miss Booke as if she would soothe matters, but seemed to address her remark to the waves.

"Eh, dear! Eh, dear!" said Mrs. Holten; "Emmie, you've got a hot temper."

Emmie wanted to swear at them. A robust swear word was at the top of her tongue and its presence there dammed the tears effectively.

"I wish you'd talk about something else," said Mrs. Grass. "Sit down, Emmie."

"No, Aunt Sophia, I'm not going to be talked to or at like that."

"You won't be talked to or at like that if you'll behave properly," said Miss Booke impenitently.

Emmie suddenly felt calmer. It was as if the little crisis had spent itself.

"Good night," she said, and this time there was nobody to catch her arm and detain her.

Mrs. Grass sighed and said, "Dear me!" . . .

Mrs. Holten shook her head. Miss Booke said: "Do her good. . . . Hot-tempered thing! . . . Going to disgrace us — or what? . . . She's not going to marry again

surely, and that man meant something or I've no eyes in my head."

"I don't know, Maria . . ." said Mrs. Grass, wishing to damp these awful thoughts.

"I do," snapped Miss Booke.

"She isn't married yet," said Mrs. Holten.

Emmie walked off a little of her temper and wondered now and then if she had been too hasty. Then she recalled Aunt Maria's phrases and almost called herself a coward. She would not put up with that any more. It was insulting: Aunt Maria wanted to be insulting. "Behave properly" indeed. What in the world had she done? Nothing at all. She had behaved properly and here were her aunts going on as if she had disgraced them.

She knew the reason: they were afraid of her marrying again. That was it. Jealous . . . with something of "Booke & Son" in the feeling too.

Emmie scarcely knew how she got back to her room, but once there she felt free to let her emotions have their sway. Yes, what had she done? . . . She went over the injustice of her aunts' remarks and the correctness of her own conduct. She had done nothing of which she ought to be ashamed. . . .

Then she drifted into the essence of the situation. Mr. Tame. . . . She wanted him. She knew she wanted him. That was really why she had been slow to reply to her aunts, for her conscience said to her — you really want him.

But Aunt Maria was a cat to call him names. Only done for spite — just venomous spite.

Emmie was tender here. Her brave showing broke and she sat down and tried to think what really would happen.

She knew she wanted him — or she would like to have him. He was such a gentleman: the very sort she would love for a husband. And she was young enough yet to want a man as a mate. . . .

Why should she not marry again? There was no harm in that: no shame in it. She had been a good wife to Tim and done her duty. Now she was a widow. . . .

Suppose Mr. Tame really proposed to her? . . .

What would her aunts say? They would go nearly mad. They would never forgive her. Grandpa too . . .

She sighed.

Could she defy them? It was all very well talking about doing what you wanted even if it was all right, but you couldn't always do it if your relatives and friends went against you. After all, she owed all her position to the Bookes. She had got the Works as hers when they'd been in the Booke family for years.

Emmie wept.

There was a knock at her door, and Aunts Jane, Maria and Sophia walked in.

Emmie looked at them sturdily, scarcely defiantly. She was wearing a dressing gown and did not speak.

Mrs. Holten said: "It's no good us quarrelling, Emmie."

"I don't want to quarrel," said Emmie, "but I won't be treated like a child."

"Nobody wants to treat you like a child; but you can't do exactly what you want. Now suppose that Mr. Tame — we might just as well have it out — wants to marry you, what will you say?"

"I refuse to discuss that," said Emmie.

"But I'm going to discuss it," said Mrs. Holten, "because we're interested. You see you've got the business.

T. Booke & Son is in your hands unfortunately and if you marry some stranger might be bossing the Booke's works, for whatever you think, we look upon that factory as ours — Booke's?"

"Well." . . . Emmie was quiet.

"Bring a stranger in there and we'll never forgive you. It wouldn't matter much if you hadn't the control of the Works: if you had some money and were bettering yourself — marrying a rich man for instance. But who is this Mr. Tame? What is he?"

"And what do you want to bother about a man for now?" said Miss Booke, "you've two children. A man doesn't go after a widow with two children unless she's money."

"I've told you, Emmie," said Mrs. Holten, "we want to be friends for Tim's sake and the children's: but do anything foolish ——"

"Foolish — wicked I call it," said Miss Booke.

Emmie was tingling all over.

"We'll never forgive you," added Mrs. Holten. "If you had no business and no children I'd say nothing against your marrying again: as it is — well. I've told you what I think. I should consider it disgraceful. I hope you'll take what I've said sensibly, Emmie. You've got plenty to do with your life if you look after the children and the business — but a husband *now* —" She made a movement of disgust.

"I should think so," ejaculated Miss Booke.

When Emmie was alone again she had a good cry. Why should she be attacked this way? Why shouldn't she marry again? . . .

Her questions were not answered but she passed a fitful and melancholy night and rose in the morning with a kind of resignation.

Mrs. Holten and Mrs. Grass were very pleasant to her in the morning as if they wished to show her how very nice they could be if she behaved herself in a fashion of which they approved. And Miss Booke, who came down later, was also very affable and agreeable and suggested they should go for a little picnic.

Emmie had almost come to the conclusion that one must not expect to get all one desired in this life and was prepared to let Mr. Tame fade from her plans if not from her memory.

He was not in sight as they waited for breakfast and Emmie wondered if he had gone . . . or was offended at Aunt Maria's behaviour to him.

Then suddenly she saw him at the gate. Just as he was turning to come in a girl about twenty, remarkably pretty, whom Emmie had noticed with a keen interest sitting at a table not far from theirs, went up to him, talked to him, put her hand on the lapel of his coat, put her arm in his and they turned together down the promenade.

Emmie's heart seemed to give a leap.

Miss Booke, standing beside her, grunted. She, too, had observed the little comedy at the gate.

"That's it — that's his style. . . . You needn't worry your head, Emmie: that's what your friend, Mr. Tame, is after," she said, as if Providence had arranged the scene for her backing and the teaching of Emmie.

Emmie wanted to scream in her aunt's face. She wanted to rush to the gate and see where Mr. Tame and that hussy had gone.

She felt a pain inside her and wanted to sit down. But somehow she kept standing and preserved quite a discreet attitude. She managed to curl her lip a little as if she were indifferent.

Aunt Maria was deluded for the moment. She was clearly very pleased at the incident and wished her common sense, of which she imagined she had enough for a whole family, and penetrating insight could be appreciated at its proper worth. She was always right. . . . She sunned herself in the beams of a sublime self-satisfaction.

Mrs. Holten and Mrs. Grass edging to the door muttered things:

"It's a lovely day. . . . There are a lot of people about before breakfast! That's a nice dress, and not dressy, either ——"

Emmie said: "Ada ought to be back with the children."

She was looking out over the front.

"Where are they, Emmie?" Mrs. Grass asked.

"Gone for a little run," and Emmie walked to the gate as if she would hunt for them.

She looked both ways but longer in the direction Mr. Tame had gone with that pretty girl on his arm. She saw them. . . . The girl seemed very happy. He, too . . .

Emmie had to catch her breath. She swallowed and then fiercely came back.

Aunt Maria said to herself, "She's gone to watch him." Those women who think themselves always right in their surmises are really right occasionally.

Mrs. Grass said: "Aren't they there, Emmie?"

"I didn't see them, but I expect they'll be here in a minute."

"Yes. I shouldn't worry," said Mrs. Grass, who had not seen all and did not understand, though she, with her woman's knowledge, felt there was more than the absence of the children disturbing Emmie.

During breakfast Emmie looked after the children al-

most ostentatiously. She was also very observant of other people in the room and ate very little. She managed to hide this last fact rather deftly, for she had some fish, which she broke up on her plate, accusing herself temporarily of waste with the instinct of an economical woman and poohpoohing the accusation with the fury of a jealous one a moment later. When her aunts appeared to be busily engaged with their own breakfasts, or at least, not watching her, Emmie got the waitress to take her plate away as if she had finished.

Mrs. Grass passed her the marmalade which Emmie did not want. But she smeared some on her plate, broke up some toast into bits and had an air of having made a capital breakfast.

Talking was her greatest difficulty. She could concentrate on nothing. She was afraid she was going to be ill and wondered if she might say she was. Her aunts might think it was due to their upsetting ways. . . . No they wouldn't: they weren't of that kind. . . . Besides Aunt Maria had seen the occurrence at the gate, and would, of course, say *that* was the reason.

And so it was. Emmie was almost literally in agony. She had never fancied she could feel so keenly over a man. When he smiled as that girl took his arm Emmie had felt her heart and stomach — principally stomach — go like lead, then as if it dissolved and left a cankerous pain behind.

She looked at the girl and could not deny she was pretty — and young. These young girls . . . men would go after them: why? . . . She knew why. Youth and innocence. . . . Innocence — bah! She — Emmie — would make him happier than any of those milk and watery creatures only just out of their teens. . . . What

did they know about life? And she was in the fine flood of life's vigour. . . .

Tim would interrupt her — and Alice. And her aunts.

When they had finished breakfast and the room was almost empty, Miss Booke suggested again that it would really be a very nice day for a picnic. They would get sandwiches — she knew that, because she had had them before once when a picnic had been got up — and they would be back in time for dinner in the evening.

Mrs. Holten was agreeable. Mrs. Grass thought it was a very nice idea. "Emmie!" . . .

"I'm not coming," said Emmie.

The aunts looked contraried.

"What's the matter?" asked Miss Booke drawing herself up.

"I'm going on the sands with the children."

"You can go to-morrow."

Emmie was not in a humour to be told what to do by her aunts just now.

"So I can: I'm going to-day, too."

Maria, Jane and Sophia looked at their niece curiously and then at each other.

"What's the matter, Emmie?" asked Mrs. Holten.

"Temper!" ejaculated Miss Booke savagely.

Emmie was on the point of making a retort and perhaps a scene, when the something prudent within her put out a restraining hand. . . . What was the good of quarrelling, after all? And they had really nothing to do with that girl. . . . It would be better to be tactful.

Emmie raised a faint smile.

"It isn't temper at all," she said. "I don't feel like going for a picnic, that's all. There is no reason why you shouldn't go without me."

The elderly ladies were in a fix. Leave their niece with this man about the house while they went away the whole day on a picnic? . . . Impossible. On the other hand be dominated by that same niece — Emmie Bollins that was? . . . Horrible predicament.

Mrs. Holten looked cross and troubled. Mrs. Grass was more troubled than cross. Miss Booke looked very angry.

"Why don't you want to go?" she said, in a fierce undertone.

Emmie was nettled and nerved by the tone. She was in a mood to fight now — to fight tactfully if need be, but to fight.

"Have you finished, children?" she said to Tim and Alice. "Tell Ada to get you ready: I am coming with you on the sands." When the children had gone, Emmie said: "There's no reason why you shouldn't go for your picnic if you want."

"Nonsense," said Miss Booke; "what's to prevent you coming?"

"I don't understand you, Emmie," said Mrs. Holten. "If there's any reason for your not coming let us hear it; we can go to the picnic another day."

"The reason is, I don't want to go," said Emmie, and, looking through the door, she caught sight of Mr. Tame standing. Was he waiting for her? Or was that girl with him? She had the weak feeling in the stomach again. . . . It was horrible. But she knew what she wanted all the same. She would fight for that man . . . do almost anything. . . .

She sat still, in real torture because her aunts did not get up quickly and allow her to go to Mr. Tame. Did they intend to sit there all day? She would give them

the lead, but she hoped they would move first, so as to cover up her impatience.

"If Emmie would rather stay with the children, we can go," said Mrs. Grass, "or we can put it off for another day."

"Will you come on the pier, Emmie?" asked Mrs. Holten.

"I've told the children I am going on the sands," she said.

"You can tell them you're not," said Miss Booke.

"But I won't," said Emmie sharply. "I'm not a child. I won't let you or anybody else treat me as one. If I want to go on the sands I'll go. I'm not going to be told I must do this and I mustn't do that. . . ."

She got up, flushed with emotion. Had she struck the right note? She wanted to hide her real motive, for the woman hunting the male is superlatively cunning, just as she will be superlatively daring if necessity drives.

The three ladies at the table looked as if they were grievously injured. They had a niece who would not behave properly and was a great source of trial to them. Miss Booke and Mrs. Holten considered themselves martyrs — in a mild way — and Emmie a most ungrateful creature. Here they were thinking of her welfare and happiness and look how she behaved. . . . The ingratitude there was in the world!

Emmie went out of the room, hoping she had made them believe she was offended with them for lecturing her so much. But not one of them believed it save, perhaps, Mrs. Grass, who did not do much lecturing. The other two considered they only did their duty, and consequently could not understand how any sensible — any really sensible person — could be offended at that.

Near the door Emmie glanced round. He was there — and not with that girl. Emmie, pretending to be looking for the children, turned to him and smiled.

"Your aunts seem to surround you pretty well," he ventured a little intimately.

"Yes. I am going on the sands," she said, in an undertone.

He was quick enough to catch the message in the voice.

"May I come?" he asked.

"If you want."

"Usual place?"

"Yes."

Emmie then turned smartly away and went upstairs. She shut the door of her room and muttered, "I'll show you." A somewhat vague sort of threat, which might have been meant for either that "hussy," who took Mr. Tame's arm, or for Miss Booke.

She had to sit down. Her excitement was intense and her heart was beating boisterously. But she had the look of one who had achieved something on which she had set her heart. She was now the female resolute for the male, and there may be a keener and more desperate resolution, but none more reckless. Emmie would have him now if she had to do things unusual and unwomanly. That other girl should not take his arm again — have his arms round her. . . .

Emmie was in a fury as she thought of that. She had not realised that she loved him till she saw him with that girl. It was terrible. And here were her aunts trying to stop her. . . . She'd like to see them stop her now; she'd like to see anybody stop her. . . . She would have him. She'd marry him if all the Bookes that had ever lived said she mustn't. She'd show them. . . .

The phrase was out again. It was an earnest of Em-

mie's mind. She put on her hat. She was not going on the sands to sit down and sew: she was going to see him. What would he say? Would he propose? He must. She would make him. She would lure him on till he did. . . .

But he wouldn't want any luring. He was just as keen as she was. Hadn't he been keen from the start — from the very first day?

And how quickly he said "May I come?" . . . It was lovely to hear him say that. And "usual place." . . . Usual place. . . . Emmie almost danced. Usual place meant where *she* was — that was what usual place meant.

She would have him. . . . She would show them.

Her face was burning. She put her hand up to feel her cheeks and looked at herself in the glass. What a red colour! . . .

There was a knock at the door and Mrs. Grass came in.

"There's nothing wrong, Emmie?" said Aunt Sophia, somewhat sympathetically.

Emmie had to act quickly and well, but was quite capable of filling the rôle of dust-in-the-eye thrower that every woman trying to help or encourage a man to take her has to play.

"It isn't you, Aunt Sophia," Emmie said. "But I won't be bullied. I'm tired of being told what to do and what not. Besides, to-day I feel like resting a bit."

Mrs. Grass watched her.

"You mustn't be so . . . well — you know your Aunt Jane and Aunt Maria are thinking of your good. Still, I think it will blow over. Act as if there's nothing the matter at lunch. We're going on the pier. We shall see you at lunch-time."

"Yes," said Emmie, delighted at the turn of events.

"I'm glad it's all right," said Mrs. Grass, meaning that she hoped the "row" would now be forgotten, and she smiled pleasantly as she went out.

Mr. Tame said to himself, when Emmie had gone: "Well, I'm blest." He turned round instinctively to look in the direction Emmie had gone. He was tingling with a glorious emotion. "I am going on the sands" . . . he repeated the phrase to himself. Also he repeated, "Well, I'm blest!"

He walked away before the three members of the Booke family came to the door.

Emmie gave her aunts plenty of time to go out before she came down, and then she went, with some crocheting, to that usual place on the sands.

Ada was there with Tim and Alice, who were working like splendid amateurs.

Emmie, well-dressed, watched the children.

"That's a moat, Mother," said Tim.

"Oh. . . ."

"An' I'm going to fetch the water," said Alice. "That's going to be filled with water, Mammy."

"Oh. . . ."

"And I think I shall make a bridge — could I make a bridge, Mother?"

"I should think you might, dear. . . ."

Emmie was looking round keenly to see if she were being watched by those sharp-eyed aunts of hers. Did they suspect? And were they watching?

Emmie felt one moment as if she did not mind if they were spying on her and observing her every movement, and the next that she must be discreet and prudent and most careful.

She also looked round for Mr. Tame. . . .

The sight of the children set other thoughts stirring. They would be all right. Why not? She had the money and he would be kind to them. . . . She could tell that: he was of that sort. Besides, she must have him — she must marry him.

"So that's the terrible castle, is it?"

Emmie turned. He was there. Her heart gave a leap. She felt satisfied.

Tim and Alice came to him at once. He smiled at Emmie.

"I suppose you are supervising, is that it?"

"Not very keenly," she said.

She loved his easy way. Besides, she need do no luring. She could play the feminine rôle of retiring to prolong the love-making; she could watch and observe and enjoy his capture of her. He was man enough. . . .

"This is the gate," said Tim.

"And I'm going to get the water in my bucket," said Alice.

"That's for the moat," said Tim. "Can't I build a bridge? How do you build a bridge? Mine's always falling in."

"A bridge — for the fairies?"

Alice looked as if wonders were about. Tim was scornful.

"Fairies — there aren't any such things!"

"There are," shouted Alice. "Aren't there, Mr. Tame? Say there are."

"There are," he said.

Alice shouted: "There are fairies, there are fairies, there are fairies. I knew there were!"

Tim was stolid — unconvinced.

"In books," he said.

Mr. Tame laughed, looked at Emmie and caught her smile.

"Now, about the bridge," he said. "What is it really for?"

"Well," replied Tim, "castles have bridges."

"Exactly. For the knight returning from the wars with his: 'What, ho, there, varlet! Drop down the bridge and raise the portcullis!'"

Tim's eyes danced. Alice stood, mouth open, drinking in the wonderful picture.

"We'll make a bridge," said Mr. Tame, "with a piece of wood. Find one, Tim."

As Tim looked for the wood, Emmie said: "Don't worry with the children."

"It's no worry: it's a pleasure. I love children. And after the bridge-building there might, perhaps, be a walk for the mother, eh? — I nearly said sister."

"Sister — don't be silly. I'm . . . I'm nearly thirty," she said, with a kind of bravado.

"The perfect age," he said . . . "for me."

Emmie looked over the sea, the ageless sea.

Tim came back with a piece of wood, which served splendidly as a bridge, and then amid groans from the children, Mr. Tame and Emmie, after promising to be back soon, set off walking along the sands towards the cliffs on the north shore.

Emmie felt on the threshold of a great adventure. She knew what she wanted, and there were no doubts or merely the doubts of feeble strength, suggesting she might not get what she most desired.

He, having had a fairly extensive experience with women, seemed to understand her. He knew he was

acceptable to her, and he realised that the hour was propitious.

"Your husband must have died soon after you were married," he said, dashing almost at once onto the personal side of the whole matter to glean as much knowledge as he could.

Emmie responded. She told him when she was married, when Tim died, and how she managed the hat works.

"Now tell me about yourself," she said.

"Uninteresting."

"No," she said boldly.

"I never hoped for such luck," he said, and paused a moment for emphasis.

Then he told his tale. He had travelled for X & Y and A B & Co., two well-known firms, in America, Australia and the East. He had now got such a knowledge of the Eastern market, China, Japan and the East Indies, that he was going to find a partner and set up as a merchant. There were thousands of pounds to be made at the game — thousands. He was a steady chap, of good family — father was a parson in Somerset, with a big family, and he had been educated at Uppingham.

Emmie was content. The social side of his tale pleased her. He was a gentleman, father a clergyman, and had had a good education; though she was not sure if Uppingham, or whatever it was, meant college education or not. At any rate, it was good enough for her.

They walked along the sands where the waves had made cameos of their gambols, and at a bend of the cliffs he descried a kind of shelter, a covering, as it were, from the gaze of the vulgar.

"You are not going to remain a widow always!" he said.

"I don't know." She said it quietly. She did not want to damp or deter him, but she could not afford to make him do all the running till she felt he was on the course. Having gone through the mating once, she was willing to waive the satisfaction of the wooing if she made sure of the result.

"I think you hit me as you came through the door the day you arrived. . . ."

Emmie said nothing. The anticipation was most delectable.

"I said to myself, some chap's highly favoured."

Still nothing from Emmie. She was looking at the sands.

"And when I heard you were a widow . . . I nearly thanked God."

"How wicked!" she said, hanging her head and feeling joyous.

"Wicked. . . . No, not really. . . . You know what I mean."

He looked at her. He had been a little excited up to now, but her attitude reassured him and he felt that the prize was his.

"What do they call you — Emmie?"

She tried to draw herself up, or rather make a mock attempt at it — not to reprove him; he had to see she did not mind.

"Emmie." He took her by the arms. "I really don't know if I'm standing on my head or my heels. . . . Will you marry me? . . ."

He stood apart from her for a moment.

She was in ecstasy and was willing to let him go on talking now. It was lovely. . . .

He put an arm round her.

"Emmie . . . I simply fell head over heels in love

with you when you came through that doorway . . . couldn't help it, and I've been sinking farther and farther in ever since. . . ." He drew her to him. "Oh! My God! But you will. . . ."

She could feel herself being held by strong, warm arms, being held against a strong body. He held her tight and she felt in paradise.

He lifted her face and she gave a glance at him and then shut her eyes. He kissed her forehead — then her lips. She was passive at first, and he kissed her again.

She responded then, and made him realise her vigour.

Her heart was beating wildly. He still held her tightly to him and bent her face again close to his. "You haven't said Yes, darling," he whispered.

"Yes," she said, looking at him with all the passion of tell-tale eyes.

"Thank God!" he said. "It's wonderful — too wonderful for words. . . . Oh! Emmie, my darling mine. . . . It is almost incredible." He took her face in his hands, felt her flushed cheeks, saw the fire in her eyes and the eagerness in her lips. He kissed her again and she kissed him more hotly in return.

He shook his head.

"I can hardly believe it. . . . I feel in Heaven," he said. "You. . . . I almost prayed for you that night I went to you on the pier — you remember? The night you came?"

She nodded, still tingling with her magnificent ecstasy.

"Let us sit down a moment," she said.

There were no seats near, but they found a jutting bit of rock and she sat down and rested while he held her hand.

She had got him. . . . He was hers. . . . She looked

out towards the great waters and the horizon and felt as if in this gorgeous moment she struck some note akin to the infinite.

She looked at him lovingly.

"I shall want to go on kissing you, darling, all up the steps of the boarding-house."

"Silly!" she said, surrenderingly.

But she was practical the next minute.

"I don't want my aunts to know anything about it yet," she said.

"All right, darling. Anything you want. We'll keep the devoted aunts in ignorance."

She smiled at the word "devoted."

"They'll only kick up a fuss."

"I understand. Once a widow, always a widow, eh? It's the way with some of these old 'uns. Don't heed 'em, darling. We can get married on the quiet, for that matter, and then they can mingle with their surprise the thoughts about what they would have said if they'd only had time, and congratulations all in one."

Emmie looked at him admiringly. He talked beautifully — with such a gentlemanly accent, too.

"It's no good having rows, is it?"

"Reginald," he added, drawing her close to him.

"Reginald," she muttered.

"Or Reg."

"Reg. . . ."

"Or darling — darling."

She suddenly caught his face in her hands and kissed him. He fascinated her.

"If the bounteous aunts caught us now!" he suggested.

"I must go back," she said. "They said they were

going on the pier, but they are quite capable of coming to see if I am on the sands with the children."

"And I must be discreet."

"Oh, yes. . . ."

"Love has no age, has it?" he said.

She shook her head.

"I don't think it has."

They walked for a moment in silence.

"Well, Emmie darling, what is the programme?"

"I am just thinking . . . Reg dear—"

"Gorgeous!" he whispered.

"I feel like a young girl!" she said.

"I feel simply indescribable."

She laughed, and her eyes sparkled with the joy that stirred her.

"We must be sensible," she ventured; "scarcely a nod—"

"Lor'!"

"Well . . . it, er."

"The sooner the better, darling," he whispered.

She bit her lip as if she could not make up her mind to a speedy marriage and was inclined to think that would be the best way out of the situation.

"Of course, I ought not to be afraid," she said, "but I know what would happen. Aunt Jane would say this and Aunt Maria that, and I should have no peace and you would probably be insulted."

He assured her he would endure anything for her sake, but they agreed to keep the engagement quite secret for the present and behave with due reserve and circumspection.

Emmie went back to where the children were, and was at once asked where Mr. Tame was.

She sat down, took out her crocheting so that she had visible means of occupation if any of her aunts came, and looked at the ceaseless waves breaking into white foam.

Married again. . . . She was going to be married again . . . have another husband — and what a man! What a gentleman! There was no more distinguished gentleman in Ganton!

She could feel his arms round her . . . his lips on hers. . . .

She did not care if he hadn't a penny. She had plenty.

When he held her in his arms and lifted up her face with his hand and then kissed her. . . .

As she recalled the same her blood seemed to rush through her.

"So here you are?" said Aunt Sophia.

Emmie turned and looked unexpectedly pleasant.

"Yes, here am I. Have you enjoyed your walk on the pier?"

"Yes, thank you," said Mrs. Holten, as if soothed with satisfaction.

At any rate, Emmie was on the sands — and not with that man.

CHAPTER XXII

EMMIE was inclined to overdo her pleasantness towards her aunts, so easy is it for happy people to forget worries. Fortunately, the elder ladies, being moved by a certain amount of egotism, could not see Emmie except through their own coloured spectacles, and so attributed the change in her behaviour towards them to a realisation of the error of her ways and a proper repentance. So dull can vanity make us.

Before, during, or after lunch, Mr. Tame made no sign. Emmie had a meal for remembrance. Eat. . . . She wanted nothing to eat. She had something other than food to digest.

To be married again . . . to be married again. . . . The phrase ran through her brain, bringing pictures in its train. She saw herself once more the married woman with the man by her side. . . .

Appealed to by Aunt Sophia — did she know who that lady was sitting at the table opposite: very like Mrs. Oxton . . . might be her sister. Emmie leaned forward with a smile, the attitude of beautiful willingness, and had to hear the question again.

And she was willing to do anything or go anywhere her aunts suggested. They were delighted. She had quite clearly seen how wrong she had been and was now quite prepared to make amends. Now they were almost inclined to go to bed in the afternoon, so great was their confidence in her. Bed was merely hinted at, but at once put aside as an absurd idea for practical common sense ladies, who came to the seaside for health and fresh

air; they could rest in a cosy chair on the sands, or take it easy on the pier. . . .

Emmie didn't mind. Whatever was suggested, she didn't mind!

All through lunch she tried to listen to her aunts and pay them some attention — enough to allay all suspicion and keep them agreeable, and to see in a gorgeous panorama her own dazzling future.

The physical side kept asserting itself. In the middle of a pleasant fancy, seeing herself as Mrs. Tame and all her friends looking at her with surprise, and envy, she would feel Reginald's arm round her, his lips on hers, and she had to give herself a little shake to get her nervous centres ready to respond to Aunt Jane's emotional remarks and not to bother so much with these other things.

A drive was suggested. Emmie was, of course, perfectly willing to go a drive as she was to do anything else that afternoon. She was intent on deceiving and possessed in full the capacity of the woman in love to deceive anybody and everybody with ease and success.

She could stare past Reginald as if he were not known to her while her aunts were about, and give him a glance to stir his soul the moment they had gone to dress.

In her room she allowed her imagination rein. What would they say in Ganton? It would cause a talk. At tea tables it would be "Mrs. Booke's married again," and then, "What! . . . Who to?" And then they would learn she had married a gentleman, a perfect gentleman. . . . . Once the marriage was a fact her aunts would admit Reginald was a gentleman. . . . Aunt Jane might call him "Collar and Cuffs" now, but that was only spite. . . .

And he would come to Ganton. . . . Of course. . . .

And she did not care a bit if he had no money. What did it matter? She had no money when she married Tim: now she had money and her husband could be as poor as he liked.

"Emmie — are you ready?"

It was Aunt Sophia at the door.

Emmie grabbed her hat and invited Aunt Sophia to come in.

"Are you ready?" she said.

"Yes, Aunt Jane and Aunt Maria are downstairs."

Emmie laughed.

"I don't know what I've been doing," she said. "I thought there was plenty of time. You're taking a coat, I see, Aunt Sophia."

"Oh, yes; you'd better take one, too; it'll be cold, you know, driving."

It was the oddest drive Emmie had ever had. If she could have talked about Reginald to sympathetic aunts it would have been different; but she had to talk about that woman with the green dress — most awful colour Aunt Jane had ever seen — and that lady with the spectacles, a lady if ever there was one . . . lost her money . . . come down a bit . . . but what a lady! You should have seen her at the door with the clergyman. . . . "He was the suffragan," Aunt Jane heard her say. "Knew what she was talking about," Aunt Jane affirmed. And there was that pudding they had last night. Aunt Sophia had fruit, as she wasn't feeling too well — was the pudding nice? Very nice indeed, and simple, too — people could say what they liked, but "The Towers" was managed by somebody with a head on her shoulders. And sleeves were going less — a good thing, too. Those balloon arrangements were most awkward. . . .

Emmie, trying to catch a sufficient thread of this (and there were eight miles of it, excluding rest and refreshment for man and beast) to hang a suitable word on, was all the time thinking of her husband-to-be . . . her new life . . . what they would say in Ganton . . . and what sort of a dress should she be married in. It couldn't be white, of course — purple . . . she could carry purple . . . or a more delicate colour, mauve . . . or rose. . . . A light grey with some red about her would look well, too. . . .

That, mixed with the other conversation, gave Emmie an afternoon of singular enjoyment.

The elder ladies went to bed early. They all discovered the fresh air made them sleepy, and Emmie walked upstairs at the same time. She, however, came down again.

Mr. Tame was waiting at the door.

"You won't feel cold without a wrap of some kind?" he said.

"Oh, no."

"It's a lovely evening for a little stroll," he said, as he and Emmie turned to walk on the front.

"It's awful," he said, as soon as they were out of earshot of anybody.

"What?" she said, with a smile, putting her hand on his, which was pressing her arm.

"Seeing you only like this."

"Is it?" she said, smiling. "Still, it's the best we can do at present."

"Let's go and get married to-morrow," he said.

"To-morrow — oh! . . . that . . . oh! . . ."

"Why not? What's the good of waiting, darling?"

"I. . . . Well, I don't want to wait if you don't, dear,

but to-morrow. . . . And we should know just a *bit* about each other."

"You've told me all I want to know about you. I love you and that ends it as far as I am concerned."

She squeezed his arm against her body. It was splendid to be loved and beautiful to hear it said by a man in earnest.

He went on: "I don't know if you want to know any more about me. You really ought to have some guarantee that I am all right, but I will show you the pater's and mater's photos — I think I've got one of the family taken on the lawn. You can see the pater's doings in Crockford; it isn't much of a living — about four twenty net — but it's a lovely house. The mater will adore you, Emmie. One of my sisters is married to a parson: he was a curate with us; very nice chap, too; he's got a living now in Lincolnshire. And I've another sister at home. The pater was at B.N.C.— Oxford — did fairly well, too. He wanted me to go to Oxford, but I didn't care about taking orders and got a job in an insurance office. That was horribly slow, and then I went to Fonds and Mells, got travelling — and you know the rest. Not much money, darling, but I shall earn plenty when I get this Eastern business of mine going: there's a gold mine in that — a perfect gold mine."

"I don't care about anything," said Emmie; "I'm going to marry you."

"You are a darling." He put an arm round her.

She looked round; there was nobody to watch.

They kissed.

"I feel as if I were twenty," Emmie said.

"I feel as if I were in heaven," he said.

Emmie pressed his arm tightly, as if she would let him feel the warmth in her blood.

"At present I don't want my aunts to know. Of course, they will have to know later," she said.

"Look here, Emmie mine." He stopped and held her close to him. "How would you like to run with me down to Staplemore — that's where the pater's living is, and let him marry us. I'll arrange it if you like — get the license, and all that. . . ."

Emmie looked at him. He was very handsome in her eyes, and such a gentleman! His voice was like nobody else's she had ever heard. His father had been to Oxford University, too, and wanted Reginald to go. . . . Her husband had *nearly* been to Oxford. . . .

"I don't know. . . ." She hesitated.

"Don't know what, darling?"

She pursed her lips.

He kissed her.

"That's all right, Mrs. Reginald Tame," he said, holding her very close to him. "I'll write to the pater and tell him all. He'll understand — or we could get married here, for that matter. With a special license, you know, we could get married anywhere."

"Let's leave it till to-morrow, dear," she said. "I'll think it over. It might be simplest to stay on here with my aunts, go back with them, and then when Ada and the children are at home . . . eh?"

"As you like. The sooner the better. I'll get the license, eh?"

She nodded.

Emmie showed very great skill in keeping her intentions towards Mr. Reginald Tame well hidden from her aunts. They really thought they had put their feet down on that business for good and all. Mrs. Grass gave herself credit for having seen the affair at the outset and having called in her doughty sisters. Miss Booke felt

that she alone had nipped the thing in the bud with her straightforward, frank method, and Mrs. Holten imagined that by her tact and common sense she had effectively stopped Emmie from doing "a very foolish thing."

Consequently, a week after they had all returned from Blackpool and were going about their usual duties in the usual way, they were greatly surprised (and with the surprise must be imagined all the emotions that accompanied it) to receive a letter from Emmie (almost identical to the three aunts), which ran:

DEAR AUNT JANE:

I want to inform you that I am going to be married to Mr. Tame. I would have told you before, but as you seemed to disapprove of the idea, I thought it best not to worry you. We are to be married to-day. I hope the marriage won't make any difference to our feelings to one another and I am sure I needn't tell you that you will be as welcome at Helston House as always.

Reginald and I hope to be back in about ten days. With love.

Your affectionate niece, EMMIE.

The quotation that rang through the respective houses of the aunts was "Reginald and I—"

Aunt Jane put on her bonnet and almost dashed to Miss Booke's, where Sophia had already arrived.

"Well!"

"Well!"

"Did you ever!"

"The sly thing! . . . Carrying on with him all that time. . . . Going out with us and pretending she was having nothing to do with him—the little hypocrite. . . . Emmie Bollins all over. . . . And that 'Reginald and I'—"

"Reginald and I."

"Reginald and I."

The disgust, scorn and contempt could not be improved on. The ladies said it with all the emphasis they could command. . . . "Reginald and I!" and there followed the toss of the head, the fierce contempt on the face, and the subsequent expression of defeat.

In spite of what they had done and said, Emmie had married him. . . .

And a common thought moved them: What about T. Booke & Son? . . .

The letter to Mr. Booke was different from that to the aunts.

MY DEAR GRANDPA:

I write to inform you that I am going to be married again. I think I did my duty to Tim and I have never forgotten how happy we were together: but that doesn't seem to me a reason why I shouldn't mary again, and I have found some one that I care for who, I think, will be a good husband to me. But I want to tell you that it won't make any difference in my feeling to you and I hope it won't make any difference in yours towards me. I shall always remember you are Tim's father and you will always be as welcome at my house as you have ever been. You have always been very kind to me and I am very grateful, and I should be very sorry if my getting married again brought any coldness between us. It won't on my part, I assure you.

I would have told you before, but I had decided to keep it quiet till I was married. I hope you will call and see Tim and Alice while I am away. I told Ada to take them to see you.

With love.

Yours affectionately,

EMMIE.

There was also another letter.

MY DEAR MOTHER AND FATHER:

I am going to be married again to a Mr. Reginald Tame, that I met at Blackpool. He is a perfect gentleman. His father is a clergyman and went to Oxford, and Reginald could have gone there too, only he didn't want. I couldn't tell you before because *some* people might have made a lot of fuss if they had heard, and I want to be able to say I told them when I told you. You know why . . . three aunts! It won't make any difference to you — you know what I mean. You'll get the money as before, and perhaps more soon; and Sarah can always have some when she wants. We're going to London for the honeymoon — only about a week or ten days, as we've both just been to Blackpool.

We're being married by special license by his father, who is coming to a friend's church in Crewe. Reginald's mother and sister — two sisters — and brother-in-law, who is also a clergyman, are coming to the wedding. I wanted to tell you, but it meant new clothes and that meant telling everybody, so I thought a five-pound note would do instead. I enclose it herewith. I am being married in mauve — you'll see it when we come back. I have a Gainsborough hat with a fine white ostrich feather.

With best love.

Your affectionate daughter,

EMMIE.

The news spread over Ganton very quickly.

"Mrs. Tim Booke's married again."

"Oh! . . . Who to?"

"Some chap as she met at Blackpool, I hear."

"Hatter?"

"No. Don't know what he is. I understand he's well connected, a gentleman, from all accounts."

"Any money?"

"Don't know. She's enough in any case."

"Oh, ay. What's she going to do with the business?"

"Haven't heard. Perhaps he'll run it."

"Well, she's only about thirty. . . . Young enough to want a chap. . . . Th' Bookes won't like it."

"No fear."

Alice Cannell's comment was:

"Mrs. Tim Booke married again. . . . Well, I always said Emmie would."

CHAPTER XXIII

IT seemed to Emmie as if she were really happier on her second honeymoon than on her first. Timidity and apprehension gave way to an unhampered zest. Besides Reginald was a gentleman and Emmie gloried in that. His dress, his manners, his accent had a fascinating influence on her and she felt as if she now belonged to a better world than that in which she had hitherto moved.

They stayed at a good hotel in the west end and Reginald ordered waiters with perfect ease, and held her dress as she got in and out of hansoms as if every trick of that trade was habitual to him.

Emmie was supremely happy. She felt she had got all she wanted and more than she deserved in this new husband of hers.

She observed other visitors in the hotel and noted dress and jewellery with a discerning eye. There were lots of wealthy and handsome women there but Emmie envied none.

And Reginald seemed to improve in her eyes. He was easy tempered, most pleasant with the tongue and charming in all his ways.

They discussed the future slightly. It had already been decided that they should go on living at Helston House, and he showed Emmie some of the letters he had received from men who had entered into correspondence with him respecting his plan of trading with the East.

But Emmie with the blood flowing warm in her said he needn't " be in a hurry to close with any of these correspondents. . . . She had money enough. She liked a

man to work, but still there was no need for him to risk anything and if this trading with the East meant that he would have to go to his Japan and China and Borneo for long visits —— no fear. . . ." And as he held her to him he seemed to have no wish to leave her for long spells either.

When the honeymoon came to an end and they were at Euston station ready for the journey home, Emmie was full of the glow of gratitude in that she should have been allowed to be so happy. She was proud of her husband. She wanted to let Ganton see him. She had not made a fool of herself in marrying again: she had mated herself to a gentleman. She knew some of them would be jealous; they would say spiteful things. . . . It didn't matter. She was married: she was well off: she owned T. Booke and Son. They could say what they liked.

As the cab rolled up from Ganton Station up Manchester Road, Emmie kept looking out of the window as if she were eager to see and be seen. She pointed out Aunt Jane's house and houses of friends.

Reginald held his wife's hand and seemed very interested in all the information he received, though he had paid Ganton a visit before the wedding.

Ada came to the door with Tim and Alice, and Emmie almost cried as she saw her children. It was just a wave of some tender emotion that swept through, inexplicable as the wind which bloweth where it listeth.

She kissed them both and they were full of a wild excitement at seeing their mother and new father, the beloved Mr. Tame. He behaved very well.

Emmie said: "Here is your new daddy, children."

Mr. Tame lifted Alice up and kissed her. "Are you glad to see me?"

"Oh! Yes," and Alice hugged him round the neck and kissed him freely.

"That's right. You, Tim?"

"Yes," and he put up his face to be kissed. "You are going to live here, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"I am glad!" said Alice.

"So am I," added Tim. "Will you help me with my sums? Miss Blake says it doesn't matter if we get shown at home. I'm doing practice."

"Glorious," said Mr. Tame. "We'll practise together."

Emmie, in showing him over the house, felt a kind of pride but at the same time a small anxiety that he should approve. He had criticised some of the decoration in the hotel in London and Emmie had suddenly said to herself: "I wonder what he'll think of home?" The idea that he might say certain things were in bad taste had not occurred before, and she almost wished she had got new bits of carpet. . . .

But he behaved most tactfully, letting her see he was very pleased with everything.

"Do you like it?" she asked, as they walked upstairs.

"The palace of dreams."

"No, really?"

He put an arm round her.

"Don't you see you make everything of almost no account beside you? It's all splendid. I imagine walking into this house and calling this"—he drew her close to him—"mine."

"Well," she said, "it won't be a serious business to get a few new things if we want. Here's the bedroom."

"Ours?"

"Yes. Doesn't it seem funny me showing you this?"

"It's all funny, darling. I am afraid every moment I shall wake up and find it all a dream. I am really awake, aren't I?"

He saw the works from the window and realised their actuality. They seemed to give him a sense of substantial security.

Ernest Mullins came in, and Emmie introduced the two men. She felt a little stirred as she said:

"My Manager, Mr. Mullins. . . . My husband, Mr. Tame."

The two men shook hands.

Ernest said: "Pleased to meet you."

Reginald replied: "I am certainly very pleased to meet my wife's manager."

Ernest gave a little laugh and Emmie, hoping he was quite impressed with her husband, also laughed a little.

"Ernest manages the business," she said.

Reginald offered a cigar to Ernest, who refused it, saying he rarely smoked cigars.

"Well, how are things?" Emmie asked.

"All right. Wool's gone up a bit and I think we shall have to get that far blowing machine attended to. I don't know what's the matter, but it's got out of order twice this week."

"Oh! . . . How are orders coming in?"

"Very well. We're on full time and look like keeping it up for a long while yet."

"Did Welton's send that cheque?"

"Yes — came yesterday."

"Pay it in the bank."

"At once."

"That's right. Mr. Tame would like to see round to-morrow — you might go with him, Ernest."

"Right, any time."

"Any time will suit me," said Mr. Tame.

They arranged to go round in the morning and then Mr. Tame asked: "Do you do any business with the East?"

"East?" repeated Ernest. "What — Turkey?"

"I was rather thinking of Japan, China, the Dutch Islands."

Ernest shook his head as if the suggestion were rather weird.

"Yet there must be hats sold there?"

"Um-n." Ernest seemed to regard the statement as of small moment. He was saying to himself that Mr. Tame knew nothing about hats and couldn't teach *him* (Ernest) anything.

Mr. Tame read something of this in Ernest's attitude.

"Still, you know your business, don't you?"

"We should do," replied Ernest with a laugh and in a tone and style that suggested Mr. Tame had better think twice before meddling with a business he did not understand.

Reginald nodded and smoked his cigar.

As Ernest was leaving, Emmie said: "At ten o'clock then, Ernest, Mr. Tame will come."

"Right. Good-night, Mr. Tame."

"Good-night, Mr. Mullins."

"Good-night, Ernest," said Emmie.

"Good-night, Mrs. Tame."

Emmie nodded pleasantly.

"He's been a very good manager, Reginald," said Emmie, when Ernest had gone.

"Looks honest and reliable."

"He is that. I think it's time we had tea; don't you want some, dear?"

"I suppose I do, but I still feel as if I were wandering about in a palace of dreams —"

Emmie smiled lovingly.

He kissed her.

"How dare you?" he whispered.

She kissed him. She was supremely happy. Her thoughts now were all wound round him. She wanted him to be comfortable, to be satisfied with the house, with the place, with the people. She wanted to dazzle him if possible so that he would love her more for she was so very much in love with him.

"Where are the children?" he asked.

"In the kitchen with Ada. I'm going to get tea — we'll have it here."

"Here" was the dining-room.

"Yes." He wondered for a moment if there was another room, or if tea was occasionally served in the drawing-room.

"The children and I often have our meals in the kitchen," Emmie said. "Come and have a look at it."

She put her arm in his as they walked the little space from the dining-room to the kitchen.

Both Tim and Alice rushed to Mr. Tame the moment they saw him.

"Father," Alice said in his ears.

"That's right."

"I was going to say father, too," said Tim.

"Say it, Tim," Mr. Tame suggested.

"Father."

"Good! Doing lessons, Tim?"

"Not yet. I don't do them till after tea; we haven't much to-night — some spellings and to write a short account of the Slaughter of the Innocents."

"I must help you with the Slaughter of the Innocents."

"And will you help me, too, Father?" Alice asked.

"You haven't got lessons to do, surely?"

"No, but when I have."

"Of course."

"These are my dollies," said Alice. "That's Ruby, that's Rose, that's Jane, and that's Dorothy."

"What a family!"

Alice smiled proudly.

Emmie, watching the scene, was delighted to see her husband and the children on such good terms.

"It's a big kitchen, isn't it?" she said.

"It is indeed — as good a room as any in the house."

"Yes, well it's been used most. Now I'm going to get tea. Ada, lay the table in the dining-room."

Mr. and Mrs. Bollins called in the evening. They were both dressed in their best and endeavoured to make a good impression on their new son-in-law whose father had been to Oxford University. They would probably have preferred Emmie to have remained Mrs. Booke, but since she hadn't the only thing was to make the best of the situation.

Mr. Tame was very pleasant and both Mr. and Mrs. Bollins went home with a distinct liking for him. He went to the door with them, took Mrs. Bollins by the arm, gave Mr. Bollins two cigars, and bade them good-night charmingly.

There was no visit that day from either Mr. Booke or any of the aunts. Emmie said to herself: "They don't want me to think they're in a hurry to come and see my new husband."

As time went on and Reginald smoked and read the evening paper, Emmie attended to some household duties.

The children had been in bed some time. Ada had gone to bed. There was an air of quietness in the house.

Emmie, accustomed to managing the house, had always seen to the locking of the doors and the fastening of the windows. Moreover, being her own mistress, she had naturally gone to bed at whatever time she chose — within reasonable limits. In a town like Ganton one cannot do exactly as one wishes. Other people are considered. There is a public opinion bred in the minds of the average resident of certain pretentions. For instance, if your light is kept burning late too frequently that becomes (or may become in the opinion of the imaginer) a topic for discussion. It takes this form: Mrs. X. doesn't mind her gas bill — which suggests waste and a disregard of economy. Or, " Mrs. X. sits up late — she can't be working till this hour. If she is, she's a bad manager." There is apparently no escape. Of course, you may ignore the comment or be indifferent to it: that makes a difference.

Emmie had been influenced by her mother and her aunts. She really had paid homage to Public Opinion or the God called " What Will People Say? " and now she felt as if her absolute freedom of worship was a little in the balance. Things were different, of course, but even now she could not wholly escape from the idea that people might talk if they saw the light burning late. . . .

And there was another feeling: Who was going to decide when it was bed time? She was quite prepared to allow that province to be her husband's, but he sat there as if he might go on sitting there all night. . . . Was he waiting for her? Should she make a move? She did not quite like to be the one to suggest going to bed the first night they reached home. . . . Tim had always taken the lead, in a very easy and comfortable way, in matters in which they were both concerned. Reginald was not like Tim in many ways.

"Ten o'clock you are going to see over the works, Reginald, isn't it?" she said, more to bring him to a sense of the time then than for the sake of information.

He put down the paper.

"Yes, ten, my darling," he said, looking at her most affectionately. "Are you coming, too?"

"I don't think so — you don't want me to."

"Not at all necessary, if you don't want: and I expect you've seen over the place often enough."

"Yes."

She sat in the chair doing nothing, thinking if she started saying anything of that kind he might be less inclined for bed, or might imagine she wished to stay up.

There was silence for a moment. He felt curious in his new home.

"You know, Emmie," he said, "I think there ought to be a good market in the East for hats; I don't see why not. . . ."

"Um-m," Emmie was saying to herself. "Oh, let's go to bed and not bother about hats now," but softening it, imaginatively putting an arm round his neck and pleading. Then quickly the thought came: Love is very sweet and all that, but if you can get your husband into the way that makes things run smoothly and suit you, so much the better. . . . And the next moment she thought: "Bless him! I'd stay up all night if he wanted me to."

"Emmie," he said, "you're sleepy."

She felt stirred at the way he said it. There was a ring in it.

"Am I?" she said, smiling at him.

"Yes. I expect it's early to bed and early to rise here, eh?"

"Oh! not that early: only I've been in the habit of getting into bed by half-past ten — or before eleven at the latest."

"Eleven. . . . It's that now. Come on: I expect we're both a bit fagged with the day's travelling."

Lest he should hesitate further, Emmie discreetly said: "Will you lock up?"

"Lock up . . . Lord! I never locked up in my life. You do it, darling. I expect you'll do it ever so much better than I shall."

Emmie, glad to feel that at last they were going to bed, went to the front door, side door, and back door, and pushed bolts and turned keys. She looked at the kitchen grate to see if the fire was out or harmless, then at the windows to see if the catches were all fastened.

When she had made her round she came back to the dining-room.

"I'm ready," she said.

He beckoned her playfully.

She felt very tired and wanted very badly to go to bed, but the hint of love in Reginald's attitude made her walk to him with a kind of fierce joy, a mingling of sweet and bitter.

He drew her to him.

"And did you think I was going to be left alone when I turned this light out? In the dark with the loved one and I groping to a door-way. . . ."

Emmie looked at him, wondering whether he were acting or really serious.

"Just imagine," he went on, "I with her in my arms — her, mind you — the her of all hers "— he kissed her —" the light is out. . . . Phew. . . ."

"Silly!" she said, feeling very happy. "Do you realise I'm an old married woman?" She felt she could try

that on him now and her sleepiness seemed to have vanished as with a wizard's wand.

"Old married woman. . . ." He lifted her chin and bent back her head. "Not much of the old married woman about you — you darling."

He knew he stirred her. Her breast heaved and fell and her eyes were brilliant. He kissed her on both cheeks and then on the lips.

Emmie thought Tim was all right, but this is Heaven. And I haven't got to try any dodges, and my figure's my own. . . .

Reginald turned out the light.

"And now to bed, as Mr. Pepys would write," he said.

Emmie realised that her husband could make her forget fatigue and almost anything if he wanted. . . .

Reginald had certainly got the art of dressing tastefully and Emmie was very glad he looked so well in his clothes; but she wondered the next morning if he were going to wear a clean collar every day — and surely not a clean shirt too!

She was down first and told Ada breakfast was to be served in the dining-room.

The children were very glad to see "father," and he was really very nice with them. Moreover, he seemed to be agreeable with them naturally, and not as if he were forcing himself to do something he did not like.

At ten o'clock, Emmie, who was now wearing an apron and making the beds, came downstairs and said: "I expect Ernest will wait for you in the office, Reginald."

"Oh. . . . Then I'll go to him." He put down the *Guardian* and said: "Which way, dear?"

Emmie showed him the way and Ernest was waiting for him in the yard.

Ernest had to admit that Mr. Tame took a very keen interest in what he was shown. His questions were sensible and business-like. At the end of the tour, when they had visited almost every room in the factory, the two men stood in Ernest's little office which adjoined the counting-house.

"Well," said Mr. Tame, "it seems to me hat-making is a question of turn-over and enterprise."

Ernest nodded.

"If," said Mr. Tame, "the turn-over were doubled certain fixed charges would not be increased at all; hats could be sold cheaper and there would be a bigger profit."

Again Ernest nodded.

"Of course, every hat manufacturer could say that," he said.

"Quite true, and why not?"

Ernest moved a little uneasily.

"Easier said than done, I suppose."

"I find that the big firms in anything are those who won't stand still, who go ahead, who, when they see a thing is sound and profitable, go for it — but go for it properly."

"Um . . . um. . . . I've seen one or two hatters come a cropper through going for things as they thought."

Ernest seemed to talk as if he were somewhat antagonistic.

Mr. Tame nodded.

"Well, thanks very much," he said, "for showing me over. I hope I haven't interfered with your work at all."

"I am glad to have been of any assistance," Ernest replied, won to a little more pleasantness by Mr. Tame's agreeable ways.

Emmie was in the kitchen, with a big white apron in front of her when Reginald returned from his visit round the works. She was busy making pies, and kept dipping her hand in a little basin to take out flour, to sprinkle on the paste which she promptly rolled with a very clean looking wooden roller.

She smiled as her husband came in.

"Well, what do you think of the works?"

"Very interesting, most beautiful hatter. I have an idea you could do a lot more business if your man Ernest had a little more enterprise."

"Oh . . . he's very reliable."

"Yes. But the people who get on, the people who do really big things, you know, are something more than reliable. Men that you can trust ought really to be cheap. It means keeping in the same old rut, and being careful not to upset the cart, but the same old ruts lead to the same old places, my dear little Emmie. . . . I've seen firms grow — seen them grow from small things to big. It's when they open their eyes and find markets where they never dreamt of them that they begin to go ahead."

Emmie rolled her paste.

"This is an old established firm."

"Yes."

"And has done very well, too."

"Also ran, my darling."

"Also ran. . . ."

"Yes, love. . . . It has struck me, Emmie, that there is not merely a nice income in this business — but wealth — big wealth — wealth beyond the dreams of avarice."

"I'm sure I don't object to the wealth coming — if we don't spoil what we've got."

"You don't do that. Fresh markets are all to the

good surely. Why, there are markets in the East, for instance, that could double the output of this factory easily."

"Did you say anything to Ernest about this?"

"Well, Ernest gave me the impression of being inclined to the critical side. He was very willing to show me all there was to be seen and tell me all I wished to know: but I fancy I caught a hint in his mind of the man who wondered what this husband of his mistress was really after — should I do him out of his job — something of that kind."

"Oh . . . Reginald!"

"True, oh! Emmie, my darling. However, we can make allowances for the importance of being Ernest, still there's the problem. I expect these works have done fairly well and so everybody is content if they don't do any worse."

"I am," said Emmie, quickly.

"What's that?" he asked, coming near to her.

"It's going to be a tart — red-currant and raspberry: do you like it?"

"I like it, but I wonder if I shall have the impudence to eat what my blessed wife has made."

"Silly!"

He stroked her cheek.

Emmie felt the difference between her two husbands. Tim loved her and was always kind and considerate, but he never fussed her in quite the same charming way that Reginald did. And she loved this fussing and these pretty speeches.

"What are you going to do now?" she asked.

"I am going to enquire into the export trade in hats, darling."

Emmie looked at him. She was pleased and fright-

ened a little — pleased that he was taking such an interest in her business, and frightened lest things happened. . . . She had *au fond* the woman's great belief in security.

"How? Where?"

"Somewhere. I think I'll run down to Manchester."

"Dinner is at one."

"Oh . . . with the red-currant and raspberry tart. . . . Couldn't miss it for all the trade of the East. I'll go to-morrow, darling, and take a stroll round Ganton's streets this morning."

At that moment the yard door creaked and Emmie, looking through the window, to see who opened the door, waited for a moment and then said: "Grandpa! . . . It's Grandpa," she said, and at once put down the paste and roller, wiped her hands on a towel near and went to greet Mr. Booke.

She opened the door as he came up the steps and said: "I am glad to see you," and kissed him as he entered.

He betrayed very little emotion: it was difficult to say if he were moved or not.

He said: "I thought I'd come and see you and your new husband."

One might have detected a trace of reproach in the tone of the last two words: they were not cordially uttered.

"Here I am," said Reginald very pleasantly, and Mr. Booke, a little surprised, stood his ground stolidly.

Reginald held out his hand.

Emmie said: "That's Mr. Tame, Grandpa," in a tone that was just a little charged with emotion, as if she pleaded delicately for friendship.

Mr. Booke very slowly put out his hand and eyed Reginald keenly and critically.

"You soon made up your minds," he said.

"Yes," replied Reginald, "there was no wisdom in delay."

"Oh! . . . Let's hope not. May I ask what your line of business is?"

"I've been travelling in the East."

"On commission?"

"Partly, and partly on salary."

"Made a lot o' money, I expect."

Reginald struck an easy attitude.

"There's plenty to be made in the East."

"Chaps as are steady and work hard if they've got level heads can make money anywhere. Have you got a business now?"

"I was about to set up as a merchant — buying from and selling to the East."

"Oh . . . and got married instead."

"Got married — not necessarily instead," said Reginald very pleasantly.

"Will you stay to dinner, Grandpa?" said Emmie, not liking Reginald to be too closely cross-examined about his business.

"No, thank you. You got enough to feed."

"Well, sit down a minute."

"I won't stay. I wanted to see you and your . . . new husband. Let's see, what did you say you were doing now, Mr. . . . Mr. . . ."

"Tame."

"Tame, ay?"

"I was, as I said, about to set up in business as an Eastern merchant."

"Oh! Ay. . . . And got married while you were doing it. . . . Lucky your wife's got a home and an income."

"I'm very lucky to have got such a wife," said Reginald.

"Ay, I agree with you."

"Have you been away yet, Grandpa?" asked Emmie, desiring to drag the conversation into a channel that would lead them away from a discussion of her husband's business, which was apparently something at which Grandpa could direct his quiet sarcasm.

Mr. Booke shook his head.

"Not yet. The children all right?"

"Oh! Yes."

"From all accounts you were very clever at Blackpool. You two."

Reginald did not seem to mind Grandpa's conversation very much; but his nature was of that easy, comfortable kind that is not quickly depressed. Emmie could bear up to a point and then she retorted; but she had never retorted yet to Mr. Booke, and at this time she felt he was to be permitted to say a few nasty things if he wished.

Reginald was saying to himself: "Fine old chap . . . could give anybody Hell if he wanted . . . doesn't like me . . . perhaps natural . . . has a tongue . . . doesn't mind if he makes things a bit uncomfortable . . . lucky your wife's got a home and income — the devil! . . . It is lucky all the same. . . ."

Reginald almost had a smile on his face as if he could see the little comedy of soul being played there in that kitchen with an eye, a mind undisturbed.

Emmie said, in answer to the charge of cleverness:

"You have to be clever sometimes, Grandpa."

He took time over his replies.

"Ay, you can be too clever sometimes. . . . I like straightforward people myself."

"I think we all do," said Reginald quickly, but very pleasantly.

Grandpa felt the hit.

Emmie dashed in with: "We shouldn't have hidden it from anybody, only I wasn't going to be lectured and made miserable about it. If we wanted to get married why should other people keep lecturing us?"

After a pause Mr. Booke said: "Well, it's done now. You must make the best of it."

When he had gone Reginald said to Emmie: "Grandpa is not too benevolently disposed."

"Well, you must not mind. Tim was his only son . . . and these works were his."

"I don't mind at all," said Reginald. "These things are like fungi and wet days and finding yourself without tobacco — you must put up with 'em and when you've got a darling wife to help you to put up with 'em —"

He had now got Emmie's face in his hands and he kissed her.

"Let me get on with this pie," she said, "or we shan't have dinner by two o'clock." She put her hand on the oven door. "And that oven's drawing beautifully."

After tea Emmie and Reginald had another ordeal for the three aunts called.

They came to the front door and Ada let them in. Their expressions were those of people who had sternly adopted a certain attitude and that not an affable one. Their backs were stiff. Mrs. Grass even refused to break into a smile.

Emmie and Reginald rose as Mrs. Holten led the sisters into the dining-room.

Emmie went towards them with a little more than her usual warmth as if she would make up for the lack of

confidence, but was chilled at once. There were no kisses exchanged. They all shook hands. "How do you do? . . . How do you do? . . . How do you do?"

Reginald said cheerily:

"I think we have met before," to Mrs. Grass and Miss Booke.

Mrs. Grass said, "Yes," and relaxed a trifle. Miss Booke also said, "Yes," but as if she had been keeping the word on ice.

"Mrs. Holten, isn't it?" he said, holding out his hand to that lady.

Emmie said, "Yes," and wondered what was going to happen.

Mrs. Holten shook hands very coldly, and then said:

"We may as well be frank, Emmie; we don't think you treated us well."

"Sit down," said Emmie, and after a moment's hesitation they all occupied chairs, but in such a fashion as to suggest a temporary discomfort.

"Perhaps not," continued Emmie, "but you didn't seem to approve at Blackpool, and so I thought it best to keep the whole thing quiet."

"Cowardice," said Miss Booke.

"Call it what you like," said Emmie. "Perhaps it was. But if I had told you in Blackpool, you — well, I don't know what you would have said or done, but I don't think you would have enjoyed the holiday as much as you did."

"That," said Mrs. Holten, "is a weak excuse. We are Tim's aunts. You wouldn't be in this house now if you hadn't married our nephew, and the least you could have done was to have told us when you were engaged to be married again."

"The very least," added Miss Booke.

"After all," said Mrs. Grass, "we have your interests at heart, Emmie."

"Well, I'm very happy, Aunt Sophia."

"Very happy . . . and Tim scarcely cold," said Miss Booke, sitting bolt upright and looking at the window curtains towards Christ Church graveyard.

Emmie bit her lip. She took refuge in silence.

Reginald to himself said, "What a corpse!"

"You shouldn't forget, Emmie," continued Mrs. Holten, as if some set remarks had been decided upon beforehand as proper and fit for the occasion, "that as all you possess comes from our family, from the Bookes, we naturally looked to you to treat us with some consideration."

"Consideration!" repeated Aunt Jane, withering the word.

"We had a right to expect that. . . . In fact, I can't think of any nice minded woman in your position who would have suddenly written to us, under the circumstances, to tell us so coolly she was married."

"For the second time," added Aunt Jane grimly, sitting with folded arms.

"Yes . . . so soon after Tim's death," said Mrs. Holten, with an approach at solemnity and feeling.

"It wouldn't have happened," said Emmie, "if you hadn't gone on at Blackpool."

"Gone on," snapped Miss Booke; "what do you mean by gone on?"

"If you hadn't said so much," said Emmie, a little warmly. Her face was flushed now and she was preparing to hit back.

"Excuse me a moment, ladies," said Reginald, "I am interested in this conversation. After all, it is surely not a very serious thing that our engagement was kept secret from you. Emmie has told you the reason. Of

course, we are sorry if you feel hurt — very sorry. We apologise. There was no intention of hurting you: it was merely to keep to the line of what was most agreeable we did, I think — at least Emmie did — let you know as soon as anybody else knew —"

"Excuse me," said Miss Booke, moving a little horizontally on her chair, for she could not improve her perpendicular attitude, "but as you have thought fit, Mr. Tame, to interfere, I suppose you won't mind answering a few questions."

Mr. Tame smiled very politely.

"It will, of course," he said, "depend to some extent what those questions are."

Miss Booke, feeling he had scored a small point by his manner, moved again on her chair.

"Family questions," she said as she thought, smartly. "As you are one of the family, I think we have a right to know *something* . . . about you."

"I am quite willing to tell you anything about myself that you have a right to know."

"Will you tell us what you are?"

"I suppose I might describe myself as a traveller."

"A commercial traveller?"

"Yes."

The ladies looked at each other. They did not despise commercial travellers, having too much knowledge of business and enough common sense; but this was an exceptional case. They felt themselves at liberty to find holes where they could in this present matter.

"And are you travelling for — a firm now?"

"No."

"Out of work?" asked Miss Booke, quickly.

Emmie began to look uncomfortable. Even Reginald was piqued.

"I have been travelling in the East — Japan, China, the F. M. S., Java — all the Dutch East Indies, and I came back to set up in business for myself as a merchant."

That sounded better.

Miss Booke was bold.

"Then you have money?"

"Some," he replied.

"I suppose it would be indiscreet to ask how much?" ventured Mrs. Holten, just a trifle diffidently.

"I think it would," he replied very urbanely, and Emmie felt as if she could clap her hands. She wanted to shriek at her aunts for their prying, interfering ways.

"Emmie, by the death of her late husband," said Miss Booke, "has inherited money and these works — T. Booke and Son. Of course, it's very nice for a man without money to come into a bit by marrying her; but we shall always look on what Emmie has as Booke money. It was made by Bookes and ought to be kept for Bookes. There are two children, you know, by Emmie's first husband, and all poor Tim left should be theirs. . . . If only Tim had known he would have left a different will —"

Emmie burst into tears.

Reginald went to her at once.

"It's all right, darling," he muttered. "Buck up! It doesn't matter." He turned to the aunts. "I think, if you don't mind, we'll close this topic: it isn't very pleasant for Emmie, and I must admit you can't be accused of a lack of frankness."

"It's better than being hypocrites," snapped Aunt Jane.

Mrs. Holten rose and the other two took the signal from her.

Mrs. Holten, holding her hands in front of her and standing very erect, addressed Emmie: "We shan't worry you any more now, Emmie. We shall keep friends

for Tim's sake — and the children's. We shall be glad to see you, but you mustn't think we approve. We have said what we have said to-day because we thought it our duty."

"A duty to poor dead Tim," added Miss Booke.

Emmie was almost sobbing, but Reginald by her side soothed her.

"I will show you out," he said to his relatives by marriage quite politely, and led the way to the door, where they followed with a strained dignity, feeling a little angry that he behaved so politely.

When they had gone, he came back to Emmie.

"Don't let it worry you, darling," he said, putting an arm round her. "They are number one size, twenty-two carat cats. They would have had pyramids erected over them in Egypt. . . . Well, I'm damned! . . . They take Huntley and Palmer's works. . . . What has Aunt Jane got inside her? — blood or vinegar? . . . Ye Gods! And they'll be friends . . . and only do this from a sense of duty — Oh! my God! Emmie, that lot should be packed off to the East by the first boat, to an island I know where the natives still indulge in cannibalism and don't mind a little waltz with a victim first. . . . Phew! Come on, we'll go to Manchester to the theatre and forget these blessed aunts for the moment."

Emmie looked up at him. She had stopped crying. She felt very grateful to him for the way he had acted before her aunts — at any rate they saw he was in love with her. She did not regret what had happened because Reginald had come so beautifully to her side and behaved like a gentleman.

Her face was still drawn, but she put her hands on his shoulders and they kissed.

"Get ready," he said.

"Shall we?"

"Yes, we'll wash out the taste of Aunts Jane, Maria, and Sophia at the Royal or the Princess — let's see what's on. . . . The Geisha's a capital piece. We shall forget Faith, Hope, and Charity absolutely watching the blessed Geisha. So quick, Emmie, darling . . . we'll catch the next train. We've just time."

And Emmie said to herself as she went upstairs: "They can say what they like, but if I had my chance back I'd do it again!"

CHAPTER XXIV

MR. TAME made no effort to carry into effect this scheme for establishing himself in business as an Importer and Exporter from and to the East. Neither did Emmie press him. She was so happy with him that she would not disturb the joyful current of their lives. The years of widowhood had given her a renewed zest in married life and she flung herself into the duty of considering her man with a fine enthusiasm. Reginald had suggested they should have a joint private banking account and she willingly agreed. Why not? Husband and wife surely were one.

But though her husband followed no settled occupation he took a great deal of interest in hatting. He went over T. Booke and Son's frequently: he talked to Ernest and also Mr. Booke and Emmie. He had apparently ideas on business that were large and sound, having imbibed them from his association with the big firms he had represented in the East.

"Double, treble, quadruple your turn-over and that's when you begin to make headway," he would say to Ernest, who used to shake his head a good deal and fancy that if only Mr. Tame knew a bit more about hatting he'd talk a little less about it. All very well saying double, treble, quadruple your turnover — you had to *do* it.

Mr. Booke's views seemed to be almost a replica of Ernest's but they were sparingly expressed. The Bookes were cautious if shrewd, and old Timothy in listening to Reginald (whom he did not dislike — to put it impositively) would wonder occasionally if the ideas were those

of a brilliant business man or of a dreamer. Yet he could not find flaws in the arguments: he merely raised difficulties and generally ended by shrugging his shoulders and declaring that, after all, the works were no longer his.

The fact that Reginald talked over these business ideas with "Grandpa" pleased Emmie, especially when she learned that Grandpa could find little to say against them. She was glad because it put Reginald, her husband, in a favourable light. Grandpa would see she had not married a fool but a smart business man as well as a gentleman. Even when Reginald talked to Ernest about business Emmie was pleased: it all seemed to reflect well on her. She could say (imaginatively), "Isn't my husband clever as well as a gentleman? Are you surprised I married him? I've got something about me to attract a man like that, haven't I? He could have married any time if he'd wanted and he asked me"—and that, of course, heightened her love for Reginald.

Emmie, Reginald and Ernest were in the dining-room discussing business. Reginald had firmly persuaded himself and Emmie that what they ought to pursue was a forward policy.

"No trade can stand still," he said, "and it isn't that they can't make hats in Ganton."

Ernest gave a little laugh.

"Beat anybody," he said.

"Exactly. One can see that from the returns. Do we do any shipping business?"

Ernest shook his head.

"Not much. We get an order now and again for Canada or Brazil, but not much: our's is a home trade."

"Any reason why we shouldn't do both?"

"We've never bothered much with shippers. We take their orders of course, but we don't run after them."

"Why not?"

Ernest looked a bit piqued.

"I'm not fault finding — don't think that," said Reginald. "I expect T. Booke & Son never did run after shipping orders."

"No."

"But so far as I can see there is no reason, is there, why they shouldn't?"

Ernest paused.

"It's a different line."

"Does that matter?"

"The lines that we go on pay fairly well."

"Yes. But what is there against our forging ahead? Why shouldn't we try and double our output?"

"No reason at all."

"But we don't do it. Mr. Booke never did it and the system, which pays fairly well, let us admit that, still goes on. Now I don't believe in standing still. I have been connected with firms that sent men all round the world — that's the way to do business. That shows imagination and enterprise — and it pays. Of course there is no reason why we shouldn't try and get all the trade we can at home: the home market is a good one — the best from many points of view — but you have to compete with every hat manufacturer in Ganton and in the country for that, whereas you only compete with a few firms when you go so far afield. Most businesses, between you and me, Ernest, are run in this country on the theory that foreign trade is risky and troublesome and not to be bothered with unless you are absolutely forced to do it. And then some of them do it as if they conferred a favour on the poor foreigner by dealing with him. I've seen it. Well known English firms will deal with big Chinese Importers on the Take-it-as-I-send-it-or-do-without-it system;

whereas the German says, What do you want? Packed in small boxes? Certainly. Another label? Certainly. Made a bit longer? Certainly. Anything we can do to oblige — certainly. The Englishman says: What! different length, different weight, different label! — oh! be damned to you and your orders!"

Emmie and Ernest laughed.

"I've heard these Germans are very pushing," said Ernest, "but they're no good at hatting."

(This conversation took place, of course, long before the war.)

"No."

"If it weren't for their big tariff there'd scarcely be a German made hat in Germany."

"So I understand. But," continued Reginald, "we can do with copying a few of their ways. Success in business comes to those who see far and wide, don't stick in a rut and work hard. Just listen. I suppose we can turn out about roughly say — five hundred to seven hundred dozen a week: that's our capacity. But it doesn't matter: I'll imagine we can do a thousand dozen a week. Then suppose we turned out two thousand dozen — would our working expenses be twice as much? Not at all. That second thousand dozen might not cost more than thirty or, if you like, fifty per cent., of what the first thousand cost. But since we only make one thousand and not two we have to regulate our prices accordingly. Now let's see: suppose we make one thousand dozen hats and decide to charge thirty-six shillings a dozen, what could we charge if we made two thousand dozen? We'll suppose the second thousand cost fifty per cent. of what the first thousand cost, which is eighteen shillings a dozen or an average of twenty-seven shillings! I don't say the figures are

right actually — they are probably not — but they point to a fact that if you can increase your output you can decrease your charges without decreasing your profit. In fact you can undersell the man who only turns out his five hundred or thousand dozen, and you can actually get a bigger profit on each dozen you sell, too!"

He paused.

"You understand, Emmie?"

"Yes, I think so," said Emmie, who had put down her work-basket now, for Reginald talked so easily and clearly she grasped his point easily and was deeply interested.

"You follow, Ernest?"

"Yes."

"That's the point to aim at," continued Reginald; "of course, if you make rotten stuff it doesn't matter if you make five hundred or five thousand dozen you won't sell them. But we can make hats. T. Booke & Son is an established business and has proved its capacity to make hats, and you, Ernest, can see that that goes on, can't you?"

"I think so," said Ernest, pleased at the recognition of his ability.

"So that if we increased our output, we could keep up the quality of our goods, which is of a recognized saleable standard, and lower the price?"

"Y—yes."

"If we lowered our prices we should expect to get more orders?"

"That's it — Suppose we didn't?"

"I won't suppose anything of the kind. If we can sell five hundred dozen of an article that is in common use like a hat by charging thirty-six shillings a dozen we shall sell

more if we offer the same hat at thirty or thirty-three shillings. Particularly if we go into any and every market that we can reach. . . . Eh?"

Ernest was silent: he was not to be hastened into enthusiasm.

(Emmie looked from Reginald to Ernest to watch the effects of her husband's argument, which really astonished her. She thought: "If only Aunt Jane and Aunt Maria could hear him now.". . . Also she was assimilating the whole point in its practical side.)

"We can increase our output at present by something — I don't know what: you might know, Ernest — without incurring much expense. For instance, those boilers would serve for the making of fifteen hundred or two thousand dozen just as easily as for what they do now. We have room in some of those sheds for more planks — that's rent saved. But in my opinion that's tinkering. We could get more orders by going to new markets but then we only offer the hats we make now at our present prices. I think we should prepare to turn out fifteen hundred dozen a week: I'm not particular about the precise number, only I think we ought to double our present capacity. Then we have a splendid article to offer and we ought to sell it without any trouble."

Emmie said: "What do you think, Ernest?"

"It means money."

"Yes," said Emmie. "How would you double our present capacity, Reginald?"

"Build, dear, and get new machinery."

"But that would mean spending a lot of money!"

"It would."

"And where's the money to come from?"

"We must raise it. If we haven't got it all we can surely get the balance by mortgaging the works."

"Mortgage," said Emmie, to whom the word was something of ill omen, something that generally turned out a sinister and horrible thing in a tale.

"Risky," said Ernest, shaking his head.

"It was risky to start these works at all," said Reginald with a laugh. "Surely it isn't more risky to enlarge when these have proved a success. Have we got less pluck than the original Mr. Booke? It's the firms that risk on sound business lines that get on and do the trade that's going. Stick-in-the-muds have no chance. Besides, our machinery is out of date."

Emmie looked at Ernest as if that was something interesting to him.

Ernest looked uneasy. Out of date machinery. . . .

He said: "It's doing fairly well for us."

"Yes, but it's out of date. Have you seen the new machine for weighing fur bodies?"

Emmie looked very surprised. How did Reginald know all about this? She was totally ignorant of the new machine for weighing fur bodies. . . .

Ernest said almost sulkily: "I saw it at the Exhibition."

"At Manchester?" asked Emmie.

"Yes."

"What is it?" she asked.

"Ernest will explain it," said Reginald. "He knows the details of those things much better than I do."

Ernest, flattered a little, was pleasanter:

"Very ingenious," he said. "You know how the fur body is made now. The fur's blown on a cone and taken off when the man think's there's enough on. But with the new machinery the fur's weighed first."

"That means," said Reginald, "that every hat is the

same weight. No variation you see — sorry I interrupted you, Ernest — go on."

"Then after being weighed the fur is carried into the box-like arrangement where a fan underneath draws it on to a cone, that's revolving all the time and when there is enough fur on a bell rings. Out goes the cone, another lot of fur comes in. . . . Oh! very ingenious. American invention I believe. Smart chaps these Yankees."

"Yes," said Reginald.

"I should like to see it," said Emmie.

"We'll have one fixed up," said Reginald, "and see how it works."

Is he the master already? thought Ernest.

Emmie had a similar thought, but it rounded itself with: He can do what he likes if he won't ruin me.

"You can't afford to neglect inventions," said Reginald. "Every firm should allow so much every year for the trial of new dodges and machinery, otherwise somebody will get in front of them. We all allow for bad debts, why not for the trying of things that might turn out profitable? There's another thing, Ernest, have you ever gone into the figures of the foreign trade in hats?"

"Well . . . not particularly," said Ernest. "Smith Sons & Kemp do a lot with Canada and J. K. P. & Co. used to do a lot with Australia. About £6,000 a year they used to do, but the tariff knocked them down to £600 — that's foreign trade." (Ernest thought he had scored.)

"That's all business. Every big firm loses a good market one day and finds another the next. I expect J. K. P. & Co. didn't go under because they lost a trade of five thousand a year with some one."

"No. They say they're doing very well with Japan now."

Reginald laughed. So did Emmie.

"I'll give you some figures. They are only 1894 returns but they will serve." He took out a piece of paper from his pocket and began to read:

"Sweden & Norway ..... 4910 dozen £10,492

— that's what they took in 1894 from this country.

"Denmark	4142	dozen	£7,260
Germany	23164	"	£31,228
Holland	11808	"	£24,693
Belgium	29798	"	£47,962
France	40175	"	£59,609
Roumania	3896	"	£2,701
Turkey	1699	"	£3,184
Egypt	1013	"	£2,418
United States	8695	"	£18,476
Brazil	8945	"	£21,245
British South Africa	47295	"	£64,385
New South Wales	31816	"	£34,598
Canada	84506	"	£99,896

and others. A bit of trade there, Ernest."

"Ay. . . . I didn't think it was so big."

"How did you find all that out?" asked Emmie, glowing with pride in her brilliant husband.

"Out of a periodical I saw lying in the office."

"Oh! Um . . ." said Ernest. "I don't often read it." He referred to the technical paper.

"We sent out of this country apparently in 1894," said Reginald, "something like £632,649 worth of hats. Now I suggest that with enterprise a great many more could have been exported: but in any case there is room for T. Booke & Son in that trade. Also we don't want to stop at a profit of fifteen hundred pounds a year: we ought to make three thousand, five thousand — ten thousand ——"

"Reginald!" said Emmie, looking magnificently astonished.

Ernest laughed.

"It's easy talking," he said.

"You think it over," said Reginald. "The sooner we start preparing to double our capacity, having also an eye on a second doubling, the better. Have a cigar, Ernest?"

"I don't mind if I do," said Ernest.

"And a whiskey?"

"And a whiskey. . . . We've got something to think of," he said with a laugh that seemed made up of hope and fear.

"Yes — a glorious business," said Reginald.

Unostentatiously, without any fuss and with a graceful ease Reginald took in hand the management of T. Booke & Son. Ernest was not displaced and Reginald never attempted to interfere in any of the technical processes of hatting, but the new master slipped easily into position.

Emmie was really very pleased. What could be better than that her business should be her husband's? If she had continued making hats and Reginald had thrown his energies in some other direction their interests to some extent would have been divided. Besides, Reginald's entry into the firm had been accomplished not only tactfully and without ruffling anybody's sensibilities (save members of the Booke family, the ladies of which were as fretful as porcupines, and Timothy, as suspicious as he was anxious), but to Emmie, at any rate, great prosperity seemed to be the promise of it.

The fact was, Reginald had seen business carried on by firms whose enterprise and interest circled the world. There were no confines to their markets, and he knew how such businesses were organised. Moreover, he was clear and had such a pleasant way that if he had something sound to suggest he could make it alluring. He was capable of seeing a question from most of its essential

sides and generally looked well round any problem he tackled. The consequence was Emmie was easily led by him in those things and Ernest followed in his train, while Mr. Booke, on being spoken to could only find old words of caution and warning, which were not really argument, but rather suggested occasionally the belittling by a man inclined to be envious of another's great vision, and was also, perhaps, afraid of failure.

Reginald certainly worked out his scheme with thoroughness and enthusiasm. He kept saying: Hatting appears to have got in a rut: we will lift it out. Most hatters are content to make as much as their fathers did: they are all capable, for in no country in the world can hats be made to equal British hats at the same price; but there is always scope for those who will go over the hill.

Ernest was set to work out estimates and plan for the greater output. He had to say how many more carding machines, felting benches, dye kettles, et cetera, if any, would be wanted. Also Reginald was determined to install the latest machinery for "forming." T. Booke & Son could make saleable hats: they would make hats as good as they had ever made, if not better, and they would sell them cheaper, because they could afford to do so by making double the quantity. He hammered these ideas home — hammered is, perhaps, a strong word, but by enthusiasm and repetitions in his speech he got Ernest and Emmie at least to see with him and believe in him.

He also enquired into extra home and foreign markets. He learned that A. B. & Co. did a big trade with Belgium: C. D. & Son did well with Canada, another firm sent thousands of dozen in the course of the year to South America, others did most of their foreign trade with the United States.

Reginald surprised Emmie by his thoroughness. He

enquired into the Japanese market (amongst others) till he learnt the styles and prices most popular there, how the goods were packed and sent and what the financial arrangements were. He seemed to neglect nothing.

Money had to be found for the new buildings and new machinery and Emmie, in looking into her capital account, discovered she had saved nearly a thousand pounds a year since Tim's death. She sold what stocks she had and realised in round figures about £3,000. As the contemplated improvements and additions were estimated at £5,000, a loan of £2,000 was secured on the security of the works.

Reginald, when the new buildings were almost ready for use, went to Paris, where he appointed an agent for Holland, Belgium and France, and to Copenhagen where he found another to act as the firm's representative in the three Scandinavian countries.

Emmie missed him when he went away and was always glad to see him return. He never failed to bring presents for her and the children. She went with him on a subsequent visit to Paris, where they put up at once of the best hotels, and Reginald spent money lavishly. Emmie suggested mildly that they seemed to be living rather well, but Reginald explained that you had to impress people in business: you had to cut a dash and show that you could spend. It was worse than useless to try and be economical on occasions of this sort.

Emmie was soothed and silenced but not convinced or satisfied, for some sort of habit was restive, though she kept further protestations to herself.

But the prosperity of T. Booke & Son was undoubted. Ernest was a thoroughly capable manager and had a good business sense. Reginald's predictions had been verified. The firm made a better hat than before, for the money.

And the additional push in the sales, due to extra agents and travellers, had its results.

People in Ganton began to talk of T. Booke & Son. "They were going ahead — doing well — Due to that chap Emmie Booke married; or was it Ernest Mullins as did it?" Opinion generally leaned to Reginald as the cause of T. Booke & Son's progress and he was regarded with respectful eyes, because in the business-world success is the criterion of respect, and almost its only one.

There were, of course, others who shrugged shoulders and shook heads, but the shoulders and heads were generally those of men who had not dared to adventure, who stuck manfully and stubbornly in ruts and they said, "Wait a bit. . . . Wait till there's slack times. . . . Wait a bit." The suggestions were supposed to be the outpourings of wise men and prophetic of doom.

But Emmie rejoiced. She saw the firm going ahead. At present they were not handling more money than before because the expenses of organising this new campaign as it were, had been heavy: but the profits were growing. The fifteen hundred a year that had been the normal figure of the firm were now promising to be three thousand. Three thousand a year . . . sixty pounds a week. . . . Emmie was thrilled at the contemplation of this and wanted to go to all the members of her own and those of the Booke family and ask them if she had not done exceedingly well in marrying a man who was not only a gentleman with whom she was really in love, but was also a business man in a thousand —"well, as smart as anybody in Ganton, at any rate.". . .

To her own family she would have added: haven't I done well in my marriages?

But all the time she worked with no distaste at cooking

and housework. In fact it was Reginald who said they ought to have a cook in the house as well as Ada.

Emmie looked up at the suggestion.

"No, Reginald," she said in rather a curious tone.

"Yes, Emmie," he said. "It's absurd you doing all this work. You'll be going out washing, next."

She laughed.

"I'm strong enough: I don't mind. I don't like doing certain things — well, Ada does them and Mrs. Wright — but for the rest. . . ." She shrugged her shoulders.

"For the rest — nonsense. You don't want to be doing all that housework now. Take it easy. Besides, it doesn't look well for a lady in your position to be going about with a duster over her head and a big apron on."

"That's London, that is, or Paris. It doesn't look well when a woman objects to doing a bit of sweeping and dusting."

He laughed this time.

"That's Ganton," he said.

"I should be ashamed to do nothing — properly ashamed. What would people say?"

"Emmie, let 'em say what they like."

He won. Ada was assisted into another place and a capable general who could do plain cooking was engaged. Emmie insisted on doing most of the cooking and helped with bed-making and dusting. Reginald told her they must have a maid soon to wait at table and Emmie felt that what he said would come to pass.

The Bookes were very friendly now that they saw the works prospering. They talked in corners occasionally and felt a little uncomfortable as the tale of the firm's progress reached them. They could never forget they were T. Booke & Son, but they all seemed to feel they had to bear a reproach because this great leap forward had

not been made while the firm was under the personal supervision of a Booke. Timothy had been content to go steadily on; Tim had also kept the firm to its old and successful lines and now came this man Emmie had picked up in a boarding-house in Blackpool and did things unthought of. It was galling even if it was eminently satisfactory. The Bookes had a fly in their ointment.

As the months passed intercourse with the family had resumed almost old habits. The Sunday evening visits were part and lot of the family custom and Emmie and Reginald were roped in.

Reginald was liked. The ladies were impressed by his politeness, which had a polish and suavity they found wanting as a Ganton custom, and the men liked his talk which was varied and interesting in substance and generally racy in utterance. Besides, one could not deny he made T. Booke & Son a name to impress.

Emmie naturally lived with content. She made allowances to her sister and her parents and her father was made at Reginald's insistance a kind of foreman or odd superviser at a salary of four pounds a week. He thought he was worth every penny of it and his wife did not think it worth while undeceiving him. She had gifts he knew nothing of which she quietly put in the Post Office Savings Bank.

Reginald's father and mother and sister visited them and Emmie was exceedingly busy, seeing there was not a corner of any room that was not scrupulously clean. She baked cakes and tarts and the cellar where she stored her comestibles made one realise what a land flowing with milk and honey would be like.

The Bookes met the Tames and were on their very best behaviour. Mrs. Holten, Mrs. Grass and Miss Booke were not to be patronised by anybody. They knew their

worth — at least they knew the value they set on themselves. They did not boast the lineage of dukes nor the manners of courtiers, but they were sturdy, honest, able, independent people — particularly independent. If you boasted — they could. And they would let nobody ride the high horse over them: but they could feel flattered by acquaintanceship. If Mr. Tame's father had been a body maker or a finisher (like Samuel Bollins for instance) they could assume airs of superiority: as Mr. Tame was a clergyman who had been to Oxford they were really quite pleased to be friends. They would let the Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Tame and Miss Tame see what Ganton hatters were. And they did. They all seemed to have been baking and cooking for weeks and their houses were spotless. Not a thing seemed to be out of its place and Mrs. Tame remarked to her daughter: "Really you could eat off the floors of these people's houses, and what excellent food it is!" The food was not Savoy-Hotellish: the entrées were non-existent, fancy dishes played no part in the meals; but everything was of the best quality, cooked to a point and there was no stint. Miss Booke made the confession that freed her soul, "Well, they may have had different food, Jane, but they've never had better."

Both families seemed satisfied.

All the Tames had been most kind in manner to Emmie. They seemed to have realised that their son had been exceedingly lucky to marry a wife so well-endowed physically, mentally and financially as Emmie. Their attitudes expressed thankfulness and gratitude.

Mrs. Tame said, "You are happy, Emmie?"

"Oh! Yes."

"I am so glad."

Mrs. Tame nodded, drew Emmie to her and kissed her.

She was a tender woman, tender in gesture, in manner, in body and heart.

"Reginald is full of enthusiasms," she said.

"He's splendid," said Emmie.

After a pause Mrs. Tame said, "If he will only stick. . . . He has great ability — great ability. . . ."

"He'll stick right enough," said Emmie.

"I hope so." Mrs. Tame spoke with feeling.

"I'll see to that," said Emmie confidently.

"I trust you will . . . and — er, I hope you will save — your money I mean."

"Reginald says we shall soon be rich beyond the dreams of avarice — that's his way of putting it. Oh! we shall save right enough."

"Do. Reginald has great dreams."

"He's got a great business, too, now."

"Yes — yes," said Mrs. Tame. "That is a very good thing."

CHAPTER XXV

THE builders were not able to leave T. Booke & Sons. No sooner had they finished one job than another was ready. Reginald's imagination and his keen business grip kept up progress and saw it was allied to what was sound. The management of the firm's finances were almost wholly in his hands and he agreed to pay for this out of income, raise something on mortgage and spend a certain amount in opening up a market elsewhere. . . .

Nobody was short of money. Emmie always found a good balance at the bank and Reginald explained they must dig and plant before they could enjoy the fruit. In one sense Emmie did enjoy the fruit: she was exceedingly happy. She was very proud when she walked out with her good-looking gentlemanly husband. She was proud, too, as she surveyed " T. Booke & Son " and realised that it was hers and was growing into one of the biggest hat factories in England. In the trade people talked and she knew she was talked of. . . . " Emmie Bollins " some of them said, referring to her; others said, " Mrs. Booke," and others, " Mrs. Tame,"— It didn't matter what they called her — she was she. They meant her. As she walked down the road she could feel the remarks for she saw the nods and looks. . . . " That's Mrs. Tame — her as owns T. Booke & Son. . . ."

And in the shops she was fussed when she went in. . . . " Mrs. Tame. . . . Yes, m'm . . . send it at once. . . ." Her marriage seemed to have freshened things for her. She was more noticed than she had been even in Tim's time. After all, T. Booke & Son's progress accounted for

a deal for this big building was something they could all understand in Ganton and discuss in public-house just as well as in Club.

Tim was sent to Uppingham. Reginald had been there and Emmie was glad to see her husband keen to send the boy to "his" school. Emmie was inclined to boast about Uppingham. She quickly got abreast of the educational levels that had been reached by Gantonians and discovered that few hatters' sons had managed to do better than the Manchester Grammar School — or some boarding school that did not carry very great weight. Uppingham was a public school — Reginald put that idea into her and Emmie could not refrain from telling a few Uppingham stories to Mrs. Holten whose son was at a private boarding school in Cheshire.

"One of *the* public schools," said Emmie.

"There's any number of them," retorted Mrs. Holten sharply, "and I don't think much of some of them either," and she nodded her head, as she added to herself for her own comfort, "You don't suppose I'm going to let you crow over me, do you, you little trimmer!" Outwardly, Mrs. Holten was simply defensive.

"As Reginald says: It's a fine thing for a boy to go to a good school, and Uppingham," Emmie shook her head, "there have been bishops and titled people and I don't know what there."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Holten. "I don't know what either, and as Tom says: It's a fine thing for a boy to get a good education and never mind his mixing with bishops and titled people who won't look at him when he's got his apron on or in a hat shop. You've done well enough, Emmie, without much education."

Emmie nodded. She turned the barb —

"It isn't the same with girls," she said. "Some girls

with a fine schooling do nothing and others — well, I can hold my own, at any rate."

It was in 1900 that T. Booke & Son received the blow. There was no denying the progress of the firm: they had gone on from enlargement to enlargement; there had been all kinds of alterations and everything that contrivance and ingenuity could suggest had been introduced into the works almost regardless of expense. There had been one or two trying times for T. Booke & Son with all that machinery needed a lot of orders to keep them going and if they did not make their full complement they were almost worse off than others for they had so much plant to lie idle. Trade in general went up. 1896 had been a record year; 1897 beat it, 1898 was better, 1899 was better still. And yet hatting was not so flourishing as the general figures suggested, for there were more hats, reckoned in value, exported in 1896 than in any of the following years mentioned above. Yet, of course, one house might do well and another ill: on the whole "T. Booke & Son" had done well and justified Reginald's enterprise. They were now at the stage when they could afford to refrain from building and buying new machinery for a time and take the profits, which were in 1899 over four thousand pounds.

Emmie now sported costly furs and jewels, and there was a fine horse and gig for Reginald to drive her about in a victoria to take her to town whenever she wished. He talked now of buying a motor-car. . . .

But suddenly he said one night, "Emmie, I must go to London."

Emmie found a little more time for reading now that the children were older and she did less housework and she had a novel by Henry Seton Merriman in her hand.

They were both sitting in the dining-room; the mahogany chairs had been reseated; the Persian carpet was still wearing well; the mahogany sideboard still carried its load of silver — greater now than ever. There were pictures on the walls which Reginald had bought in Paris and London from students he had seen copying in the Luxembourg, the Louvre and the National Gallery. In a corner by the fireplace was a handsome mahogany roll-top desk which contained Reginald's papers and was used only by him. He was sitting at it now, running through papers, tearing up a great many and making calculations. Emmie was wearing a dark blue flowered gown with a red belt. She still kept an admirable figure and looked in splendid health.

"London," she said, putting "In Kedar's Tents" in her lap.

He nodded.

"Must. . . . I want to see Wyatt, and there are some things I'm enquiring into."

"When do you think of going?"

"To-morrow."

"Soon, isn't it?"

"Soonest over," he said, smiling.

"Going to take me?" she asked.

"Not this time, Emmie."

She pulled a face.

"What's the good of whirling you about?" He got up and looked at her for a moment and she was glad to hold his gaze.

"A lot of good," she said. "I don't mind being whirled to a dinner somewhere and to a theatre."

"We'll put it off a bit. I want to do a pile of business."

"What sort? Who with?"

Emmie had taken much less intimate interest in the works since Reginald had managed them. Ernest did not come in now except as he was asked — there was Reginald to refer to — so Emmie felt there was always a deal going on she could not hope to grasp.

"With Wyatt and Stock & Co., and I think I might get a Government contract."

"Oh! . . . Shall you be long?"

He shook his head.

"There's that mortgage," she said suddenly.

"I've been thinking of that," he said. "I'll manage it all right."

"How?"

"Either get them to take it a day earlier or wait till I come back."

Emmie was satisfied.

"See, darling?" he said gaily.

"Yes." She smiled, feeling happy. It was nice to be called darling by him. She looked at him as he resumed his work at the desk. What a finely shaped head he had! How straight a nose! Nice ruddy complexion, too, for a man . . . and she liked a moustache. Some didn't: but she did. . . .

She picked up "In Kedar's Tents" again and came under Merriman's fascination.

Reginald went on with his tearing and arranging and rearranging.

He was up early the next morning and after having had his bath he got out his portmanteau.

Emmie, not quite dressed, said, "Going to pack" in a surprised tone.

"Yes."

"Are you off so soon?"

"I want to go to the bank and arrange things and I don't want to have to do the packing when I come back."

"I'll do it," said Emmie. "What do you want going in? You won't be away long — two or three days?"

"H'm — pack for three days, that will do."

Emmie, in a dark striped petticoat and a white chemise, showing her arms bare almost to the shoulders, at once went to his drawers and got out collars and ties and pajamas.

"Going to take your evening dress, Reginald?"

"Think so. It might be useful — Yes, put it in, dear."

She continued the packing and he his dressing.

He usually looked at the *Guardian* at breakfast, but this morning he could not read, somehow.

"You're excited, Reginald, what is it?" said Emmie, who saw he was playing with his food.

"Excited, nonsense." He rustled the paper as if he would find something he wished to read. "I've such a lot to do before I go and I want to get to town by half past two if possible — I can catch Wyatt and save a day if I do." He looked at the paper intently.

After breakfast he went into the works and Emmie saw that his bag was labelled and his umbrella ready.

He came back in a few minutes.

"I'll drive," he said. "It will be safest. I can call at the bank and then go on to Stockport or get to Ganton Station to catch that train that meets the Euston train coming from London Road. Is my bag ready?"

"Yes, it's all ready. Have you all you want?"

"Yes, dear, thanks."

He looked into his roll-top desk again, then went upstairs and came down and picked up his umbrella and silk hat off the stand. He was wearing a black morning coat and striped trousers.

Emmie pulled a face.

"Going to leave me?" she said a little pettedly, for she always enjoyed her excursions with him to London or Paris.

He took her face in his hands and looked at her almost seriously.

"I wish I could take you, Emmie, dear," he said quietly, but with feeling.

She was stirred at once.

"Take me, then."

He shook his head.

"Haven't time. . . ."

"Well, you'll soon be home," she said as she kissed him.

He held her in his arms and kissed her more than once.

Emmie wondered a little: he was more serious, more moved than usual at a casual parting. He saw she was curious.

"It's absurd kissing you like this after all the time we've been married, isn't it?" he said.

"I don't think it will ever be absurd," she said.

He kissed her suddenly, almost fiercely.

"Good-bye, dear."

"Good-bye," she said, almost thrilled. Did he love her so much? . . . She stood at the window and watched him get into the dog-cart. Cross had put his bag in. . . . They could just see each other's faces. He raised his hat: she threw him a kiss and he went away.

Emmie received a letter next morning.

MY DEAR EMMIE:

Have arrived safely. Will write soon at length. All my love, and a kiss for Alice.

Yours, REGINALD.

No letter arrived the following day. But Ernest came to see Emmie in the course of the morning.

"There's Mr. Bowfield here," he said.

"Mr. Bowfield. . . . Oh! It will be about that mortgage."

"Yes," said Ernest, looking very serious.

"Well, hasn't Mr. Tame written him or seen about it?"

Ernest paused. "N—No."

"He was going to — where is Mr. Bowfield?"

"In the office."

"I'll go and see him — or you can tell him Ernest. Tell him that Mr. Tame will be back in a day or two if it's been overlooked."

But Ernest was shaking his head.

"What's the matter?" Emmie asked.

"I'm afraid," said Ernest, speaking deliberately, "there's something wrong."

Emmie saw vaguely many ominous things.

"Something wrong," she repeated, going a little paler, for she was saying to herself, "Has it anything to do with Reginald? and a mortgage. . . ." The word mortgage still could raise up discomforts.

"Ay. . . ."

"What?"

"I wonder if you'd better see Bowfield." He suddenly made up his mind to be frank. "It seems to me as Mr. Tame has er — well he hasn't paid back the first and second mortgages for from what I can gather there's £20,000 owing."

"What! . . . Nonsense! Nonsense! We only borrowed — was it £2,000 and then £6,000 and er. . . . We paid off the £6,000 when we borrowed the £12,000 — the last one."

"That's what I thought," said Ernest. "Now don't get too excited. What's done is done. Mr. Tame's in London . . . funny!"

"It isn't funny at all."

Ernest looked pained.

"I was only meaning it was awkward he was there when the mortgage had to be paid off, and he did know it had to be paid off when he went away."

Emmie sat down. The scenes of the parting with her husband came back to her. They had the stamp and seal of a guilty conscience over them. And the letter . . . "Will write soon at length." . . . What did it all mean? What had Reginald done? Nothing bad. . . . Had he bungled something? . . .

"What is it, Ernest?" she said.

"Now don't take on, Mrs. Tame," he said. "If we can put it right, we will. But it's no good not facing the facts, and we have to find £20,000 to-day."

"Find. They must wait."

Ernest shook his head.

"They can take every stick you've got — take T. Booke & Son and sell the whole place if they want if you don't give them £20,000 by noon to-day."

Emmie listened in amazement.

"Take and sell T. Booke & Son . . . if she did not give them £20,000 in a few hours. It was monstrous."

"But," she began, "hasn't Mr. Bowfield heard from Mr. Tame?"

Ernest nodded.

"Yes. . . . Had a letter this morning — asking him to get the mortgagees to postpone settlement for a couple of days."

"Well?"

"As Bowfield says — that's no good. The mortgagees

entered into a contract: they lent money. They will hold you to the contract. Why should they run risks? At any rate not for a simple casual request like that. Why doesn't Mr. Tame tell them why they should wait or make a promise or a proposal? But why isn't he here *now?*"

"Because he's in London," said Emmie sharply.

"Why do we owe £20,000 instead of £12,000?"

"I don't know. We can do nothing till Mr. Tame comes back."

"We'll have to, Mrs. Tame."

"We can't."

"But you can't see T. Booke & Son taken over" . . .

After a pause Emmie said: "Can we get into touch with Mr. Tame — by telegram?"

"We can 'phone," said Ernest, "if he's stopping at the Cecil."

"He wrote from there," said Emmie.

"I'll go and 'phone. Don't you worry. We'll settle it all right if it's possible." And Ernest went out, leaving Emmie bruised and doubtful. She recalled horrible things . . . the parting. . . . She began to feel something ominous in that parting. He had not gone on ordinary business, the sudden resolve. She remembered that. He had said: "Emmie, I must go to London." And when she had reminded him of the mortgage he had said he'd manage it all right. . . . But how was it the sum was £20,000? That was quite wrong. They had repaid £2,000 and £6,000. . . . Then she was chilled. Her blood was chilled. Her blood seemed to run queerly. What did it all mean?

Ernest came in. Emmie looked up anxiously.

"Well?"

"He's not there."

The words were pregnant with evil. "Not there . . . What does that mean?"

"He isn't there," said Ernest, shaking his body a little. "Hasn't stayed there. He called one day and that's all."

Emmie, after a pause, said with a groan, "Oh! Ernest, what does it mean?" Her face was working painfully.

"Don't give way now, Mrs. Tame ——"

Emmie gave a series of quick gasps as if she were mastering herself.

"I expect it's all excitement for nothing," she said with a brave show.

"Well, er . . . h'm. . . . I should be prepared if I were you. I'll see what can be done and I'll go to London if you like."

"Oh!"

Emmie's hands were moving uneasily.

"What can be the matter?" she said with a groan.

"I'll tell you what: we shall be no worse by knowing what ought to be known. I'll bring Bowfield in — shall I?"

Emmie nodded.

She sat down and tried to think. . . . What had happened? . . .

She knew what had happened by the time Mr. Bowfield had gone.

The original mortgage had been for £2,000. Reginald had conducted all the correspondence with the lawyer, the architects, builders, etc. He had suggested to Emmie she had better give him a power of attorney to sign all legal documents relating to T. Booke & Son on her behalf. She had thought it a simple matter at the time: in fact, Mr. Bowfield, seeing how the relations were between Emmie and her husband, considered the arrangement a

sensible one. The consequence was Emmie and Ernest thought they were fully abreast of what was being borrowed, but they were only told what Mr. Tame told them. There had been fresh borrowings and Emmie imagined that the first mortgage was paid off when the second was contracted, and the second paid off at the third borrowing.

At first it seemed strange why Mr. Tame should have said the first and second mortgages were being paid off if they were not — till Ernest went to the bank. Cheques had been drawn for the amounts but Mr. Bowfield had not had them. . . . Reginald had managed to get hold of the cash. . . .

Eight thousand pounds. . . . And now he could not renew the mortgage any more: the money had to be found. He had feared detection and bolted.

CHAPTER XXVI

AT first Emmie felt crushed. She was humiliated. The man she had married had robbed her. She tried to read his mind from the incidents she could recall. He loved her . . . he must have loved her. He could not have behaved as he had if he had not loved her. . . . Then why had he done this?

She recalled that remark when he held her face and she had said, "Going to leave me?" . . . "I wish I could take you, Emmie dear." There was feeling as he said that. . . .

Feeling . . . she groaned. He had her money in his pocket. He was going to spend it on — what had he done with the money? Eight thousand pounds. . . .

Was he just a money hunting cad, a common thief? . . . Or did he really love her and had he gambled say — and lost? . . .

Oh! What was she to do? Everybody to know, too. All the people in Ganton who had met him would talk about her behind her back. . . . The Bookes. . . . Aunt Jane and Aunt Maria. . . . She just wanted to groan.

Ernest and Mr. Bowfield had gone to the office and promised to go into the whole matter and report.

Emmie went upstairs and sat on the edge of the bed feeling numbed. She felt the whole affair must be wrong. . . . One of them would come hurrying across in a minute to tell her they had found out their mistake and everything was all right. . . .

But where was Reginald? He had written that letter from the "Cecil." . . . Why was he not there? Where

was he? Oh! the trick! to go there just to write the letter — and the letter!

She found it. . . . "Will write soon at length . . . all my love. . . ."

"Write soon at length. . . . Telling what had happened, etc. . . ." Oh!

Emmie groaned and threw herself on the bed and wept.

Mr. Bowfield and Ernest came back. There was a credit at the bank of over ten thousand pounds — Mr. Tames had drawn out two thousand five hundred the morning he left — but there were a number of payments due and it would be risky to reduce the balance by much. However, if it came to the pinch, Mr. Bowfield suggested they could borrow from the bank on the security of the works plus the personal covenants of Emmie and Ernest, who was willing to put his savings, nearly three thousand pounds, into the scale if need be. Mr. Bowfield thought that Mr. Feldham, the bank manager, would agree to this if he were told exactly what had happened.

Emmie at first would not agree to that at all. Nothing must be told . . . the thing must be carried through without the slightest suspicion attaching to her husband's name. After all, they had not had his version yet — and in any case she wouldn't have his name mentioned.

Mr. Bowfield and Ernest looked at one another as much as to say, "Funny creatures — women!" and Mr. Bowfield said they might not be able to do what they wanted; the mortgagees held the whip hand and if Mrs. Tame wished to keep control over her property she might have to tell the whole truth to somebody if she wished to get money.

But Emmie refused. She felt she could go to the stake,

lose all, become penniless in a kind of heroic smash rather than be humiliated before Ganton.

Mr. Bowfield grasped her attitude. He said he would do his best to renew the mortgage for another four years. The interest might have to be increased and he would suggest the offering of a bonus of £200. If Mrs. Tame wished to keep things hidden she must be willing to pay.

Emmie was quite willing to pay.

The mortgagees, won by Mr. Bowfield's tact, agreed to the renewal: he put it that the business was going ahead and that every penny was wanted. The interest was raised and £100 was accepted as a bonus.

Emmie thought that part of the affair was cheap enough.

Emmie ate no dinner that day.

Her nerves seemed set on edge through beating against the awful that was known and the rest that was unknown.

Where was Reginald? What was he going to do? Why had he taken the money? What had he done with it?

Emmie kept repeating these questions to herself till she was tired. She was always making the same answers and they were all unsatisfactory. She knew nothing except that there seemed grave grounds for supposing Reginald had helped himself to large sums of money and had gone to London.

What did he mean to do? Was he going to come back? . . . Surely he did not intend to leave her. . . .

She seemed to wander round and round in this vicious circle of uncertainly and horrible fact.

Ernest came to see her again in the afternoon and suggested he should go to London.

Emmie acquiesced. She felt she must have news of a kind.

"Nobody must know, Ernest," she said.

"Know what?"

"Anything."

"There's Bowfield."

"He mustn't hint at anything — you must tell him."

"You mean, of course, about the money."

"I mean about everything — about my husband — that he's gone."

"But if he doesn't er. . . ."

"Never mind. Leave it to me. You and Mr. Bowfield must say nothing."

Ernest nodded. If Mr. Tame did not return he felt that something would have to be said by somebody.

"I'll tell him," he said.

"What time will you go to London?"

"I can catch the four o'clock to Euston: be in soon after eight."

"You'll go to-night to the Cecil."

"Yes. But of course he won't be there. . . . It seems almost useless, doesn't it?"

Emmie pressed her hands tightly against her knees as she leaned a little forward in the chair.

"We stayed once at the Russell Hotel," she said.

"I'll go there, too."

"And I remember once he talked of a hotel near Trafalgar Square."

"Leave it to me, Mrs. Tame. I'll go to the Cecil and the Russell and any likely hotel I can think of. I may catch him. But he's sure to be in hiding. . . . Of course, I don't want to suggest anything, but as he took two thousand five hundred pounds with him he's money for a big long trip. . . . He could go to America or Aus-

tralia with that. . . . I'll try the P. and O. . . . When a man's been to a place once he goes again — that's my experience."

"How do they go to the East?" Emmie asked.

"P. & O. as a rule. Look here, don't you worry for the moment. I'll go to the Cecil and have a good hunt round. I'll telegraph the moment I have any news and when I find I can do nothing I'll come back. I shall stay at the Cecil."

Emmie nodded.

"Don't stint yourself, Ernest. I shall stand all your expenses, of course."

"That'll be all right."

All the afternoon Emmie was following up hints and suggestions and looking at the bank book and speculating and wondering. She sat down and she walked about. She lay down and, oddly, wept the moment she did so as if the easy attitude called forth a weakness. She wept in the pillow. She began to evoke pictures of Reginald with his head on that pillow. . . . She pressed her face into it.

What had happened? What had happened? . . .

She said to herself when she got up she did not mind what he had taken in the way of money. They could get over it. Money was here to-day and gone to-morrow. What was a pound more or less? Ten thousand pounds for that matter. . . . She felt a scorn for money at that time. But Reginald, her husband. . . . He could not be replaced. If he were not there her life became quite another kind of thing. . . .

She felt weak and told herself she had drunk some tea but eaten nothing all day. She couldn't eat. She looked at the clock — half past six.

When it was half past eight she wondered if she might get a telegram and was thrilled every time she heard a noise that sounded like the step of some one who might be bringing a telegram. . . .

As she undressed that night and looked at herself in the mirror she said: "Lord! I've put on ten years!"

Ernest's letter, which was to the effect that he had arrived safely and been to the Russell, Morley's, Metropole and Victoria Hotels and intended going to the P. and O. offices and more hotels in the morning and hoped she (Emmie) was bearing up well, did not arrive till midday, and by that time it had lost most of its savour for Emmie had previously sent a telegram to Ernest to this effect: "Had letter. Come back. Emmie Tame."

Emmie had boggled at the signature. Emmie was too familiar. Tame too something — at least unpleasant. Emmie Tame was a happy combination and cost no more.

This was the letter Emmie had received by the first post: —

MY DEAR EMMIE:

I have torn up half a dozen letters, for I cannot tell you what I want to tell you. First, I am a thief. I have robbed you. I am a mean, miserable thief. I must have stolen about £10,000, if not more. I have no excuse — yes, I have. I couldn't have done it if I had not had an excuse. I had to get the money, and I can't tell you the reason, that is the awful part of it. I don't know what you will think of me, but I must tell you that I love you. I feel too ashamed to write, but I could not leave you in suspense, for I have left you forever — left the woman I love best in all the world. I wonder if some day I can tell you why, and clear myself. At any rate, not yet. Don't try to find me. I am leaving England,

a miserable man. Forgive me for all the trouble I have caused you. I ask your pardon a thousand times. I don't even refer to the thefts — they are mean beyond words. You can, of course, prosecute me if you wish, but I beg of you not to. I almost think it would be best if I died, but — oh! forgive me, Emmie, if you can. I have loved you, loved you deeply and truly and still love you.

Farewell.

Your ashamed, miserable, but loving

REGINALD.

Emmie read the letter a score of times and wept fresh tears at each reading.

The tragedy was so unexpected and had come into a home where love seemed so firmly established that the blow was very hard to bear. So far as a comprehension of the matter was concerned Emmie felt in an ungraspable whirl: she could seize nothing but the fact that Reginald had gone. That was bad enough: it was that insistent fact which mocked and taunted and tortured her. But at each release she would moan "Why?" and read the letter again.

She refused to go and see Mr. Booke and told the maid to tell him she had a headache if he should call, which he did.

She forced herself to eat something, but waited impatiently for Ernest to come back. It was very resolute to keep the terrible secret, but it was also very hard. She could not tell Aunt Jane or Aunt Maria. . . . Aunt Sophia *might* be sympathetic. . . . But Emmie refused to allow herself the luxury of confession. She would not even venture to tell her mother or sister — yet. She could tell Ernest, because he practically knew; but, after all, what was there to do? Reginald had gone . . . he

had left her . . . he loved her, of course he loved her; she needed no more assurances on that head. He loved her and he had robbed her and left her. . . . Why? Why? Why?

When she looked at herself in the glass she said she was twenty years older — and it didn't matter.

She showed Ernest the letter, because she was too weak to do otherwise. She had to lean on somebody now after all this fasting and weeping and anxiety.

He did not say a word, but quietly held the letter in his hand when he had re-read it.

Emmie, red-eyed, holding a screwed up handkerchief in her hand, said: "See?"

He nodded. He really did not see well, but Emmie was a pathetic figure.

"He's gone," she said, weeping afresh.

"It's funny," he said. "Except . . ."

"What?"

"I don't know," he said quickly. He could not say, "Except he's a rogue." "It's mystifying — that's what it is — mystifying. It's hard on you."

Emmie kept shivering.

"Go to bed," he said. "After a rest you'll know what to do better. Go to bed."

Emmie really thought it was good advice. She would not sleep, but she would rest.

"Have some gruel or beef tea or something you fancy: get a bit o' salmon —"

"I couldn't eat it. I'll have some beef tea and go to bed. Keep it quiet, Ernest. In the morning there might be another letter. . . . He might write again. . . . We'll see. And I thank you very much, Ernest, for all you've done."

"Don't thank me. I'd ha' . . ." he shook his head.

"Don't thank me. . . . I'm always at your service." He spoke with sincere feeling.

"I do, all the same," said Emmie. "I'll go and lie down."

He watched her go and went back to the works looking very thoughtful.

For some days Emmie could not help feeling that something was going to happen. She did not know what. She was not quite normal and neither ate nor slept, nor thought well: she was too tired. She kept trying to face the fact — Reginald had gone . . . left her . . . and he loved her. She kept repeating this to herself without getting any nearer to an understanding of her position.

And she would tell nobody the facts. Ernest called daily and the question was inevitable from one or the other: "Any news?"— it meant news of Reginald.

For a week Emmie ambled through the twenty-four hours of each day, scarcely going outside the door, for she could not face anybody in her present state of mind. At the end of that time she knew she must have a change or make one, or she would break down.

She decided she would go to London, it might not be so restful as a quiet seaside place, but it would probably distract her more, and if she felt the need of rest she could go on to Brighton or Eastbourne or some other Southern watering place. And he had gone there. . . .

She made up her mind quickly and packed without saying a word to any one, save Ernest and the maid, who was quite capable of taking care of Alice.

"You are not going hunting after him, are you?" Ernest asked.

"No," said Emmie, but knowing quite well that her eyes would hunt well enough.

"That's right. If I were you I'd go to one of those

private hotels — a boarding-house — you'll meet people you can talk to and make friends with sooner than in some of the big hotels. I'll give you the address of one: it's very comfortable; I've been myself. And go to theatres — and to Hyde Park and Bond Street and Regent Street. And don't worry."

Emmie nodded.

"If you hear anything, Ernest, you'll wire me at once, won't you?"

"I will."

"Things otherwise are all right, aren't they?"

"Yes. And I'm to say nothing except that you're in London, with your husband, eh?"

"Let them think so."

"I expect I can put 'em off," he said.

Emmie always felt a kind of excitement when travelling by train, due to the fact that her train journeys had almost invariably been the preludes to pleasure. Even now as she kept wondering where Reginald was, what he was doing and why events had happened as they had, she was stirred by the sight of people at the station and had to speculate about them, where they were going, if they were happy, and how neatly and really rather cheaply dressed one lady was.

When she arrived at Euston she was excited again in a small way. This was London. . . . She was alone. . . . And the people hurrying, lounging, watching, racing, stirred her even as she got a porter to look after her luggage. All these people who waited about the van for their boxes and portmanteaux had a look of something extra on their faces. After all, they had made a journey for something, for pleasure or necessity, for better or worse. . . . Emmie saw one pretty wife watching her

husband gather their belongings and she felt, not jealous, but as if her own position were brought into relief and made more poignant.

She was abandoned: *her* husband had left her . . . she felt very lonesome as she sat in the hansom and was driven to the private hotel near Russell Square.

The experience of the railway journey was reproduced in the hotel. Emmie was at once interested in the people she saw and yet could not escape from her own trouble, which seemed to weigh upon her more and more heavily when she was alone in her room. In fact, although she could in a way enjoy herself in looking at the shops and the well dressed people, she felt more depressed than ever at night when she considered she was a unit in this great hive of seven million people, none of whom she could call friend at this hour of her distress. She began to feel worse than at Ganton — and in a couple of days went on to Brighton, hoping the sea, which she loved, and the sea air would do her good.

She was a little better there, but she thought she saw more happy couples there than in London and that probed her. She was too frequently reminded of her trouble. She stayed at an hotel on the front, and the constant stream of pleasant folk did not give her the balm she wished to find.

She sat on the beach and watched the waves break and gambol on the shingle; she saw the whirling and whorling of the beaten foam and would insist on interpreting it in a mood of sadness; it recalled the wasted effort of life, the struggling and struggling and disappointment. The sea itself began to wear an aspect of heartlessness: there was no kindness in it.

And as she sat watching the surging sea she looked towards the horizon: there was Reginald . . . somewhere

there . . . in that vast beyond, a mere unit like she was, and to be with him again appeared as difficult a task as to bring together two drops of water from separate oceans. . . .

Ernest wrote each day to tell her of business matters, but Emmie saw the business was mere excuse. He tried to cheer her and the effort was palpable. It was almost pathetic in her eyes and won her gradually to face the inexorable.

She wept in her room.

If only she could have known everything she thought she would have been happier, and yet she began to consider she knew enough. Her husband had gone. She had to get that fact in her head and system. She had no husband — he had left her. She would daily see other women with their husbands, but she must try not to think of herself. She must face the fact and not dream of what she desired and longed for.

It was a hard struggle, but Emmie won. She found after three or four days at Brighton that she began to watch things going on without a desire to weep because she could no longer turn to her husband and say, "Reginald, do you see that?" or tell him all about it when she got home.

And while she was there she tried to make up her mind that she would stay in Ganton. You cannot go through life without telling people what happened to you — at least, not in Ganton, and Emmie imagined it was not very different there from other places. She could not say Reginald was dead. . . . She could just tell the truth: she would say her husband had left her. The discreet would ask no more — of her, and what they said to others would not matter.

She made up her mind to write to "Grandpa" and Aunts Jane, Maria, and Sophia, as well as to her father and mother. She would tell them the bare fact of Reginald's going, say she could not give them the reason, and ask them not to pester her with questions nor to tell anybody else till she gave them permission.

But the writing of the letters tired her. Every time she came to the words, "My husband has left me," she was shaken with emotion. More than one of the letters bore the impress of her tears. The vision raised by the words was a vision cruel and black, and Emmie put the pen down more than once and wondered why and how and why and why, and wept and prayed. . . .

She wrote to Ernest:

DEAR ERNEST:

I intend coming back to-morrow. I have told Mr. Booke my husband has left me — also my aunts. I shall say I can't give the reason. I can't keep it secret from them, but there will be no necessity to tell anybody else for a long time yet: it can get out as it likes. Brighton is very nice, but I've had enough of it for the present. I expect to be home about five.

Yours sincerely,

EMMIE TAME.

When Ernest received that letter he read it again and again. He sighed. He was saying to himself: "I wonder if she would have had me if I had only asked her to marry me when I hesitated? . . ."

Mr. Booke called on Emmie the day she returned from Brighton.

She was still handsome, but there were signs of suffering to be observed. She carried herself well.

"So he's left you, has he?" Mr. Booke said, when the greetings were over.

"Yes," replied Emmie, almost calmly.

"H'mm . . . are you sorry?"

"Yes." She had to catch at her throat as she said that. The emotion the question stirred up was moving.

"Oh! . . . And no questions, eh?"

"No." She whispered that. "I can say nothing, Grandpa." She put her arms round his neck and wept.

He patted her on the back. "Things all right in . . . business?" he asked, after a pause.

"Yes."

"That's all right, then. . . . You must forget, Emmie, and don't dwell on what can't be helped. I suppose I can do nothing for you?"

"No — nobody can do anything."

He nodded.

"I'll come in and see you now and again," he said.

"Do, Grandpa."

Mrs. Grass was the first of the aunts to call.

"What's this, Emmie?" she said. "Tell me about it."

"I've told you all there is to be told."

"He's left you?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"I can't tell you."

"Don't you know?"

Emmie hesitated.

"I wish you wouldn't ask me," she said.

"Oh! but leaving you. . . . Why?"

"I tell you I — I can't explain."

"I never heard anything like it. What did he say?"

"It doesn't matter, does it?" said Emmie. "He's gone."

"Gone. . . . Well! But he must have said something or er — where is he now?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know? . . . Has he? . . . Er . . . is there another woman?"

Emmie sighed.

"I don't know."

"Er. . . . It's terrible. I can't understand it: you looked so happy. When did he go?"

"A week yesterday."

"A week yesterday. Did he say anything?"

"Good-bye — nothing more."

"Just good-bye — as usual, eh?"

"Yes."

"Just as usual, eh? And I suppose you thought everything was as usual?"

"Yes."

"H'm. And he'd left you! Dear! Dear! And he wrote, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Saying he'd left you?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"I'm not going to show you the letter, Aunt Sophia. He said he'd left me."

"Didn't mention another woman or anything like that?"

"No."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know."

"And where did he write from?"

"London."

"London, eh? It is a — er — something startling, eh? Well, you were warned, weren't you?"

"I didn't want any warning," said Emmie. "And I don't want anything nasty said now."

"Emmie! I'm sure I wouldn't say anything nasty just now to you. I'm sure you must be upset. Come and have some tea with me — er — come in to-night, when Fred's in."

"Not to-night, thanks," said Emmie.

"I expect you do feel worried. Of course, I'm very sorry, Emmie. I feel full of sympathy for you. It is, of course, a terrible thing to lose your husband like that; but — er . . . and people will talk, too. . . ."

"They can talk as much as they like," said Emmie.

And then Mrs. Holten and Miss Booke came in. They both kissed Emmie. Their attitudes suggested the sinister and the sad as if they were not in a mood to revel to-day, although a very keenly penetrating mind might have noted the adumbration of satisfaction in Miss Booke's attitude. The flag, "I told you so," was hidden somewhere about her, but she carried it and it gave her comfort.

Mrs. Holten began:

"This is news, Emmie."

"Yes," said Emmie, feeling that she had to explain and that she both wanted and did not want to talk about her sorrow. She really wished to talk about it only in the way that gave her comfort, which was not the way of the Booke ladies.

Miss Booke snorted.

"Left you, eh?"

"Yes," Emmie sat upright: she tried to be brave.

"What's he left you for?"

"I don't know." Emmie had to struggle a little, for there was the hint of a stab in the manner and the substance.

"Must have had a reason," said Miss Booke.

Emmie was silent.

"What did he say?" asked Mrs. Holten.

"That he'd left me!"

"But why?"

"I don't know."

"And have you no idea?" asked Miss Booke.

"No!"

"Funny. Had you been quarrelling at all?"

"No."

"Very funny! Another woman, eh?"

Emmie said nothing.

"Well," said Miss Booke, "if ever I had a presentiment about a man, I had about Reginald Tame."

"You were certainly warned enough, Emmie," said Mrs. Holten.

"That's what I said," ventured Mrs. Grass.

"Warning. . . . And all that secrecy. . . . And *we* shall reap the scandal," said Miss Booke.

Emmie was silent.

"I can't understand it," said Mrs. Holten.

"There's something to be explained. Have you suspected him of carrying on with anybody else, Emmie?"

"No." Emmie moved uncomfortably in her chair.

"There's something . . ." said Mrs. Grass.

"Of course, there's something," said Mrs. Holten.

"I should think there is something," added Miss Booke. "A man doesn't leave his wife, his rich wife, too, without some good reason."

Mrs. Holten shook her head.

"What are you going to do, Emmie?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing!"

"Nothing."

"But you must do something," said Miss Booke.

"You can't sit there and do nothing — what are you going to tell people?"

"Nothing."

"Ridiculous!" ejactulated Miss Booke.

"You must say something, Emmie," said Mrs. Holten. "You can't be silent. If people ask you how your husband is, what shall you say?"

"Very well, thank you."

"Rubbish!"

"Emmie! Emmie!" expostulated Mrs. Grass.

"That's silly," said Mrs. Holten. "You'll have to say you don't know, and then they'll want to know why, or you'll have to say something to keep them quiet."

"Suppose," said Emmie, "you let out the news that my husband has left me; that will do. It will be all over Ganton in no time, and then nobody will ask me how my husband is. . . ."

Emmie's nerves seemed to have reached the limit of endurance. Her chin was twitching and she had a handkerchief screwed up tightly in her hand.

Mrs. Holten looked sympathetic. So, for that matter, did Mrs. Grass.

Miss Booke could not refrain from saying: "If you'd only been advised by us!"

"I didn't want to be advised by you," said Emmie quickly, with glistening eyes.

"No. That's your mistake. And that's why you are suffering now. I don't say it serves you right, though many might think it: a good many might say it was not only what was to be expected, but what you deserved. You had a beautiful home and two children and you wouldn't be advised. You would run after the man in spite of all the warning you got —"

Emmie got up.

"If you're going on like that, Aunt Maria, I'm going upstairs."

Aunt Maria raised her head and sniffed.

Mrs. Holten moved uneasily: she liked to stab, but fixed limits for her attacks.

Mrs. Grass was saying to herself: "Maria's gone too far, as usual."

Miss Booke said: "Well, I'm not going to have it said that I didn't warn you. I'm sorry, Emmie; but . . . well, you must admit you were warned."

Emmie said sharply: "You didn't want me to marry again — that's all the warning you gave me. I didn't want your warning. If I could have my time over again I'd do it again. You don't know why Reginald's gone, and it's very nasty of you at a time like this to come here and shout at me that you warned me. I don't want that kind of sympathy."

"Who shouted?" said Aunt Jane.

Emmie did not answer. She was thrusting a handkerchief to her mouth.

"Of course, it's hard on you, Emmie, and you're in trouble. We'll do anything to help you," said Mrs. Holten. "It's a scandal, and we're in it: but we shall stand by you. You must bear up and remember the family. Your children's names are Booke and you'll have to live down this affair for their sakes. We'll help you, only it's no good getting excited or in a temper. You made a mistake in your second marriage — that's evident."

"Oh, no, it isn't, Aunt Jane."

Mrs. Holten sat up and looked cross. Contradicted like this. . . .

"Emmie!" said Miss Booke.

"It's evident," repeated Mrs. Holten, "since your husband has left you."

"It is not evident," said Emmie, flushing.

Mrs. Holten rose.

Miss Booke rose.

So did Mrs. Grass.

"One thing *is* evident," said Mrs. Holten. "You are not in a mood to talk reasonably."

Emmie said very quickly: "You can let yourselves out, can't you?"

The three ladies looked aghast.

"Well!" said Miss Booke. "And to think that this is our home!"

Emmie walked out of the dining-room upstairs.

Emmie kept on good terms with Mr. Booke and left her aunts severely alone. They came round. It was hard, but first Mrs. Grass called and attempted justification: then Mrs. Holten called and indulged in mild expostulation, which Emmie could always bear up to a certain point, and Miss Booke seemed to sniff her way back to normal intercourse.

Emmie told her own family — merely the fact that Reginald had gone, and she did not know why. They were sympathetic and happily did not attempt to probe beneath the bandages. Emmie, of course, was their benefactress.

The news spread over Ganton and caused a topic to be started in almost every public and private place. Everybody knew "Tim Booke's widow as married Master Tame!" In the club the news spread, in bar parlours, in workshops, bodymakers' shops, plankers' shops, finishers' shops, trimming-rooms. . . . "Mr. Tame gone — left her." "What — him as married Tim Booke's widow — Emmie Bollins as was. . . ."

On doorsteps, in rooms, in the street they found rea-

sons and said they couldn't understand it. And then, quietly like, all those things that come with a burst on a human family, the topic slowly sank to a whisper and almost died. It was revived occasionally by some odd thing that reminded some one of Mr. Tame or of T. Booke & Son, or something almost obscure.

The children faced the news. They only knew their daddy had gone away. At first they pestered, "Why," and, "When is he coming back?" But they understood at last that he had gone away for good and were generally hushed by other people when they asked indiscreet questions, and so acquired that old-young wisdom that tells of the thing to be avoided.

Emmie, on the whole, bore herself well. She took a keener interest in the business. She did her best not to mope, and succeeded. There were odd moments (and fairly frequent, too) when she felt neglected, when she stood in front of the mirror and knew that she was good looking and healthy, and wondered why Reginald should have left her. There were one or two grey hairs peeping in her thick black coils, but they were nothing. She was still very active, very vigorous and young. . . . And she was deserted. . . .

But she never moaned in public, though she often felt her biggest blows when others were about to remind her unwillingly that she had been abandoned by her husband. . . .

T. Booke & Son prospered. Reginald's schemes had turned out excellent, and Ernest's capable management saw that there was no turning back.

Emmie was most desirous of repaying that mortgage. It was always a source of trouble to her, and she impressed on Ernest the injunction that all profits so far as

possible should be put on one side, so that the £20,000 could be repaid at the earliest possible date. T. Booke & Son did now an enormous foreign trade. Their big buying and making on a big scale allowed them to produce a hat that could not be beaten at the price and they got their reward. They had to be prepared for slack times, but Ernest was now confident there was nothing to fear.

The first year after Reginald had gone the profits were nearly six thousand pounds. Emmie paid Ernest a salary of £500 a year and gave him 5% on the net profits, so that his income was about £800.

In the following four years the total profits were £30,000. The mortgage was paid off and Emmie put her income at something like £8000 a year. She encouraged Ernest to spend on improvements out of income and insisted on his keeping up the enterprise that Reginald had initiated.

Tim left Uppingham and wanted to go to Oxford. But Emmie said, No. There was a business for him and she was afraid Oxford would only lead him into spendthrift habits and perhaps make him despise hatting. He already said he wanted to go into the Army and Emmie had to handle him very tactfully. She sent him on the continent for eighteen months to make him more proficient in French and German, and then to the United States for six months to help the firm's representative there, so that he could learn American methods and understand the American market.

Alice was sent to Manchester High School and then to Switzerland, and developed into a very pretty and attractive girl.

Ganton changed slowly as some towns do: but the great stream of life carried people to harbour and brought on

the fresh human freights, each with its tale of promise and hope.

Emmie quietly accumulated money. T. Booke & Son continued to prosper though it had some bad months now and again. The change that affects everything did not leave Emmie alone. Grey hairs began to thrust themselves here and there among Emmie's fine black tresses and she could not refrain from regarding them as interlopers, which should be eradicated at once. She grew a little bigger — but could not be described as stout, and kept her figure remarkably well. She had shocks when she thought she might "get fat," but was always subsequently relieved. She still had a fine straight carriage and brisk walk.

That Reginald should fade from her memory was, of course, unthinkable; he occupied far more of her thoughts than many of her friends imagined. Never a day passed but she recalled some incident of the past, wondered where he was, what he was doing, or why he went. . . .

It was as if she held firmly to something cherished while tides ebbed and flowed, storms beat and the sun shone and she watched all, lived with all, marched bravely and brightly with the passing of the years talking to few of her heart's anchorage.

The business occupied her attention considerably, but she also lived again in her children. She had been a very sensible mother, taking her task of training them seriously and never regarding as a perquisite of her position a right to pry constantly or to attempt to mould them in every little way and custom. She had her reward, for the children both loved and respected her.

As Alice grew up Emmie saw herself once more as the girl who had gone on Saturday nights "to pick up some

chap or other," and she was glad her own daughter was not driven as it were by drabness to find her amusement in that fashion.

And when Alice began to be noticed first at a dance held at the Conservative Club and then apparently at tennis with patient persistency by a young lawyer named Grayson, so that gossip reached Helston House, Emmie felt stirred with pleasure. She was sorry to imagine the house without Alice, but the young man was well spoken of, well connected, and seemed likely to make a good husband, and Emmie felt she would be glad to assist her daughter to the new chapter in her life, a chapter like that which had been of supreme happiness to the mother.

The young people arranged matters very speedily. Alice was very frank with her mother, and told her far more than a young man would have told his father and mother under similar circumstances. The buying of linen and the trousseau was a labour of love for Emmie. She had been well blessed in her marriage: she determined her daughter should have every chance. Emmie was not afraid of custom. She knew many parents in this country, even when they had money, were not ashamed to turn their daughters out with a feast and very little besides, but she had no worship for money. What could she do with all the money she was now making? She went to Mr. Bowfield and settled £10,000 on Alice and gave a wedding feast that easily put hers in the shade, but one that gave the Booke ladies exceeding comfort, for was not Alice a Booke?

Tim was not quite so easily disposed of, and Emmie was reminded of those women who used to moan over the trouble their children caused them. But she was robust in her attitude and faced difficulties frankly (won-

dering now and then if some of these moaning women expected the world to be swept and cleaned for them; or if difficulties and trials had no business to appear before them).

But Tim noticing a trimmer!

That really gave Emmie a shock. She scarcely slept all night after Ernest had told her. She grasped Aunt Jane's and Aunt Maria's and Aunt Sophia's points of view in a flash — far more intensely than she had done imaginatively years before. She was troubled: pained: inclined to see something black in the affair.

The son repeating the father's way. And why not? Was not she — Emmie — once a trimmer? But that was different!

Emmie refused to befool herself. She knew now that she had been a fit mate for Tim's father: it was possible Tim, junior, might find a wife amongst the trimmers equal to her — Emmie. If he did not: that would be the only difference. At any rate, she had more sense than try the game the Bookes had played: that wasn't much good.

Emmie quietly gathered information about the girl — Sarah Tellings. There was nothing against her. She had red hair, a daring look, and an obvious figure. Emmie sniffed at this repetition of herself — as a fine actress sees a poor understudy.

She sent Tim away to the East to develop the Japanese trade — well worth the money, she said to Ernest, "and if he sees anybody on the boat, so much the better — they won't be (she almost said "trimmers") Sarah Tellings. . . ."

Ernest agreed. The Japanese market could do with a bit of stirring up.

Tim's voyage was a triumph all round: his letters were

a source of pride and interest to the whole family and were published in the local papers as interesting matter; business was improved, and when Tim returned Sarah Tellings was walking out with a bodymaker.

Every now and again Emmie had a feeling—"If Tim picks up with somebody at Belle Vue. . . ." A sort of ghost from the past to haunt and harass her. Imagine her relief when Tim casually told her one day he was engaged to a Miss Westlake.

Emmie kissed her son and was filled with so many emotions at the moment she shed tears, the first for some years.

She was very happy at Tim's choice, for Alice Westlake was a sweet girl Tim had met in Switzerland the year after he returned from Japan. Her father was a doctor in Wilmslow and Alice was the only child.

Emmie began to see the autumn of life coming to her pleasantly with a rich fulness and a bounteous promise for the remaining seasons. She was a grandmother, and her children were a great joy to her. She had few cares. Her life had not been without its troubles, but that is a commonplace for all human beings, and they can be called well favoured who meet all things with patience and good hope. Emmie began to picture herself in a house of her own, visiting her children and grandchildren and being visited by them and watching the firm, T. Booke & Son, continue in prosperity. She was what is termed "a successful woman." She was rich, still handsome, able to enjoy life, and the middle forties touched her lightly. But ever and again she dwelt on that sudden and inexplicable — to her — disappearance of the man she loved. That was her burden. Well, there are few without some care, some gnawing at the heart that brings a vision of the

might-have-been in opposition to the thing that is. Life that is emptied of all trouble scarcely seems full. She dreamt dreams when alone that she told to no one.

She and Tim had breakfast together — it was almost the eve of Tim's marriage — and he read the *Guardian* as his father and step-father had done. Emmie looked at her letters — quite a pile, for Tim's wedding incited correspondence. She always ran over the addresses before opening them to pick out favourites. Suddenly her heart beat faster. She was silent a moment: but a gust of emotion swept through her.

"Tim," she said in a quiet voice, unsteady, but full of colour.

"Yes, Mother." He looked up at once, roused by the tone.

"Nothing," she said, as if she could scarcely talk of what she fancied.

Tim was going to look again at his paper when he noticed the extraordinary expression on his mother's face.

"Anything the matter, Mother?" he asked.

Emmie shook her head.

"I don't know. . . ." She turned the envelope over and then scrutinised the letter once more. "I do believe that's from . . . your father." She almost gasped the words.

Tim looked at her.

"Father. . . . Well, open it and see."

Emmie seemed afraid. She took a knife, but even then had to look again at the handwriting before she could break the seal. What fate was in that envelope? . . .

Tim watched her, saying to himself, "Father . . ." and wondered what it meant.

Emmie nodded, and said quickly: "Yes. . . . From him."

Tim was silent. He ignored the *Guardian* and waited for his mother to speak.

Emmie trembled, and her colour had gone.

"Oh! . . . oh! . . . oh!" she said after a time, and got out a handkerchief, though she did not cry. It was as if she thought she was going to weep and found she couldn't. It was a long letter.

"What is it, Mother? What does he say?"

"Read it," and she handed the letter, but before Tim could take it she said, "No," and pulled it back. "Oh!" she said. "He's here — in London. . . . He wants to see me. . . . Oh! I don't understand. . . . Read it — No! No!"

"Mother," said Tim, going to her, "don't worry. Don't be distressed. You mustn't be made unhappy."

"I'm not unhappy, Tim." She trembled as if she were stirred by happiness that had come too suddenly: or happiness mixed with something evil — a bittersweet, with the bitter and the sweet both powerful.

She stood up. "I must read it again."

She tried to grasp it thoroughly, and eventually succeeded.

"Oh!" she said, and looked troubled. "Oh!"

"Mother," said Tim comfortingly, as if he would remind her of his ever present help in the time of trouble.

"Don't say anything, dear," said Emmie. "Wait till I've thought about it. I'll tell you later. I must think it over. Oh!" She read the letter again.

Tim looked at her anxiously.

"You mustn't be made unhappy, Mother."

She nodded and gasped and kissed him.

"I must think it over," she said. "I am . . . not . . . unhappy. . . ."

This was the letter:

MY DEAR EMMIE:

I find it difficult to begin, but of course I must tell you all. You wondered why I left you, and perhaps expected me to explain; but I couldn't, and I will tell you why.

When I married you I was already married to another woman.

It is awful, I know, and I can only hope you will forgive me when you know all.

I did not know I was married. I thought I was free.

When I travelled in Java I met — it does not matter my going into details — a woman whom I married. She had Javanese blood in her, and I did not tell my people of the marriage, as I had no intention of taking her to England, and was in one of those mad, reckless moods engendered in the East, and was prepared at that time to settle down there. But the marriage turned out a miserable failure, and in the end I decided to go back to England and my wife agreed to get a divorce, for desertion is a sufficient cause to dissolve a marriage in this country.

I kept my part of the bargain: I paid money and I went home. I received a letter saying that the divorce had been pronounced, and that I was free. I told nobody. Then I met you. I did not tell you. I ought to have done, perhaps, but it might possibly have made no difference to you: I hope not. At any rate that omission caused me no regrets.

But soon after we had been married — about fourteen months after, to be precise — I met my wife in Manchester. She then told me we were not divorced, and that she was still my wife. I had committed bigamy, and you. . . .

Perhaps I was weak. I might have told you, but I couldn't. I felt you would feel humiliated. I tried to do the obvious thing for a man placed as I was — I bought off my wife, who seemed to be filled with hate of me and jealousy of you. She had followed me to England and made no attempt to get a divorce, but — I presume — sent, or caused to be sent to me, the letter which said it had been granted.

Hence my thefts. You will understand: I thieved to save you. I had to have money or see you humiliated. The blackmail went on, but after a while my wife began to tire of the English climate and wished to return to Java. She would not, however, leave me without telling you the whole story of your position. To save you from that I had to promise money and to leave you, and as a guarantee that I would keep from you I had to return to the East.

I wonder now if you understand. This was why I was silent, why I could not explain, why I simply left you.

I traded in the East, made my wife an allowance on condition she kept silent over our marriage ceremony — yours and mine — and waited for death, which I thought of hastening more than once. But I have lived and my wife has died. I saw her corpse; I saw her buried, and so ends a chapter.

What of the next, Emmie? I am in your hands. We were happy, weren't we? The East is dazzling, but it was Hell to me. I wonder I have survived. Its trials were tortures; its beauties became sores. I was always wondering: "What is Emmie doing? . . . What is my darling thinking? . . . Does she fret at all? What does she think of me?" And I could not write. I did not want you to know where I was. I changed my name on this second visit, and those who knew me regarded me as a scoundrel. But I was fearful for you.

Now if I can do anything to wipe out the past, I will.

But first and last, Emmie, I want you. You may not know what a certain type of woman, the type one wants, will do for a man. You kept me clean and straight and decent and honourable in the steaming, stinking quarters of New Guinea and Sumatra and China. If ever I were tempted I said "Emmie." . . . At the other end of the world, in a place where men can reek and stink and play false to almost everything, I mentioned your name in a whisper to myself, and it led me through the rottenest of rotten swamps as if I were in a microbe-proof case. It was like being guarded by angels. It was my watchword —"Emmie. . . ."

I am free now. We can be married now. . . . It seems curious, but I fear lest you may wish to go on as you are. Don't you love me, Emmie? Have you forgotten me? I want you — you, always you. If you asked me what you meant to me I can only say, everything. I see your face everywhere and hear your voice at every breath of wind.

When that creature died, just outside Batavia, I kept muttering to myself: Now I am free — free to see Emmie, free to be with Emmie. . . .

And I feel it so much, dear, I am afraid. I fear lest you think that as I went so I may be forever gone. Don't let it come to that. Don't break my life, though I know I must have hurt yours; but now that you understand, can you forgive? You must forgive, dear, and we are still young enough, thank God! to enjoy life together.

I propose this — that you come quietly here to Paris, or that I meet you anywhere we are least likely to attraction, *and get married.* We will tell nobody. But, at least, you will be Mrs. Tame by right, when once that ceremony has been gone through. Then. . . . Let us live together somewhere. I can't live without you. I have lived till now so that I might right you if ever the chance should come, but I cannot go on living hopelessly

— not, at least, with any credit or benefit to anybody. I know I shall crumple up and become worthless unless I have you as my wife again. And we can be happy. We need not live in Ganton unless you wish. We can travel a little, and then settle anywhere. I am very anxious to hear how Tim and Alice are — and Ernest and the works, and grandpa and the aunts and uncles and father and mother and sister. . . .

But I will be absolutely at your wishes. If you don't want to live with me again — I will suffer the banishment and never trouble you. But I plead, Emmie. . . .

I will marry you if and how you wish and, if necessary, leave you at the church door. But I want to marry you again and live with you again, be your husband again, know that at last I have you really as my wife after all this tribulation.

I shall hope to hear from you very soon — let it be that — and I pray for forgiveness and a happy issue out of our afflictions.

With all the love that a man can bear to a woman I send this letter.

Your penitent and loving

REGINALD.

Tim was standing.

Emmie looked dazed.

"Can I . . . do anything, Mother?" he asked.

Emmie sighed and shook her head.

"Leave me a while. . . . I must think for a bit."

"Right."

He went into the works.

Emmie felt in a whirl. Certain ideas and phrases were ringing in her head. She was principally concerned with the fact that Reginald was alive, and had written a letter to her and that she was not married to him. Those two facts seemed to stand beside her and shout at her con-

tinually. She looked at the letter — three sheets of paper. . . . "My dear Emmie. Your penitent and loving Reginald."

What a letter! What news!

He was alive and. . . . But what a tale! What a tale!

He had been married before . . . to one of those half-castes.

Emmie imagined her with black eyes and big breasts and a knife in her hand.

She read the letter again, and phrases then began to make impressions. . . . "When I married you I was already married to another woman. . . ."

The sentence was like a blow from a whip. Then: "I did not know I was married: I thought I was free. . . ."

Emmie recalled the scenes at Blackpool with wonderful vividness. They softened her: they flung a glamour over the whole tale. No. He thought he was free. . . . He had probably thought of living in that enervating climate, picked up with this horrible woman with the curly hair and thick lips and breasts and hips — Emmie shuddered. She did not like to think of Reginald attracted by that woman. And then blackmailed! She could understand now. The monster had followed him and threatened to tell. He was caught. . . .

How awful it must have been! It was going on while he was scheming big things for T. Booke & Son.

Emmie began to feel sorry for Reginald. He had suffered. He must have suffered. And then been forced to go away. . . .

Emmie was filled with pity. He loved her. He had always loved her. He had gone away to save her.

But she was not married. . . .

She looked round the room as if instinctively she would have nobody near her when she considered that. Not

married. . . . And she had lived with him as his wife. . . .

She put her face in her hands with shame.

After a time she looked up. She had to face that. It was not her fault . . . and not really his. He thought he was free. . . . But if people knew! It would be awful.

Emmie walked about as if she would face that fact fairly. Living with a man without being married to him.

She realised she was only afraid of what people would say if they knew. She had no really great upbraiding of conscience the more she thought about it. She didn't know she was doing wrong. She tried to do right: she got married properly. It wasn't her fault if some wretch of a creature with a hideous mouth and with hair like a mop was a villain and tricked Reginald. . . . *They* couldn't help that. . . . Of course, she wouldn't like people to know, because people always talked. Think of Aunt Jane! *Now* Emmie felt stirred, felt what she had before construed as shame.

Not married. . . . It was an awkward situation: like what happened at the theatre or in a book. . . .

She began to think of Reginald again. What was he like? Had he changed?

But what was she going to do? He suggested they should get married. That was comical. Get married. . . . But it was a wise suggestion. She couldn't really honestly call herself Mrs. Tame till she was married. He suggested Paris or any place where they were least likely to attract attention. . . . Then she would be Mrs. Tame . . . and he would leave her at the church door if she wished. . . .

She felt softened at that. It was good of him to suggest that. Marry and then leave her. . . .

Leave her? Why? . . . Why should she let her husband go away? She loved her husband.

Tim came in.

"Well, Mother," he said.

"Oh! Tim — you haven't told anybody?"

"No. Who is there to tell?"

"Ernest."

"No. I only saw him for a minute — something's gone wrong in that proof shop again."

"I hope they'll be careful there, Tim. You'd better see to it as well. You know what a job it will be if there's too much evaporation there."

"It's all right, Mother. Ernest is seeing to it; besides, it isn't serious."

"Oh! about your father. . . ."

"Well?"

"I can't tell you yet. I don't think I shall ever be able to tell you what has happened, but . . ." she shook her head.

"Is he coming here?"

Emmie hesitated.

"N-no. . . . Not yet at any rate. . . . I may go to him first."

Emmie felt her situation was one that could only be dealt with by herself. The past was done. She might repent in sackcloth and ashes, go into a nunnery or continue as she was — the past would still be there. She was practical. The question for her to answer now was: Would she marry Reginald again and live with him?

Now that she knew why he had left her she began to think of nothing but going back to him. It seemed to her as if no other course was sensible or wise or so happy. He had come to her as a lost treasure that was found.

She began to think of him with a bold desire and a fine gladness. She said she had no need to ask Grandpa or Aunt Maria or Aunt Jane or Aunt Sophia what she ought to do — she knew what she wanted — and meant to do.

After all these years. . . . She walked about and sat down thrilled with a joy she had scarcely hoped to catch again. She looked at herself in the glass. . . . A few crow's feet, a little bloom gone, a grey hair or so, and a little more bulk, but . . . Emmie, *the* Emmie, beautiful, a good heart and head, even tempered and made for a man. . . .

"Tim — I'm going to London."

"Oh!"

"To your father."

Tim looked to see if his mother was happy and was assured.

"We shall probably go on to Paris. . . . I don't know what we shall do after — I mean where we shall live."

"It's all right, Mother?"

"Yes. I understand everything. You'd like to see your father again?"

"Yes — if you do."

Emmie smiled. If she did!

"Oh, yes. I shall never be able to tell you what parted us, but . . . it . . . er — well, it was nothing that crossed our affection for each other."

"I'm glad of that. I shall be very glad to see him again."

"He wants to see you, too. I'm going to-morrow by the eight o'clock train."

"Early."

"Yes. I want to be in London as soon as possible. Your father will meet me there. . . . I'll write and tell

you what we are going to do. I want you to say nothing till I've left and then you can say I've gone to meet Mr. Tame. You can tell Ernest and Grandpa — anybody who asks you, for that matter."

Tim nodded. He was more like Emmie than his own father — dark and distinguished looking and had a gentlemanly air. Uppingham and Reginald had done him good.

He and Alice saw their mother off at the station, and when she had gone Alice said to Tim: "Funny, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Mother didn't tell you where father had been and what he'd been doing?"

"No."

"I would like to know," said Alice.

"What does Albert say?"

Alice shook herself.

"He says, what's the good of worrying — but he'd like to know all the same," she added almost fiercely.

Tim laughed, lit a cigarette, and went to the works.

It was a memorable railway journey for Emmie. She joined the main train for Euston at Stockport and was very impatient to reach London and Reginald. There were two men in the carriage and a lady with a little boy about 10 years of age. Emmie wondered what they were all going to London for — if they went as far. . . . She thought one of the men was a commercial: he looked a bit like Mr. Rogers, one of her travellers — a ruddy faced man with a long drooping moustache. He settled himself in the corner and began reading a magazine as if he knew how to make a railway journey pass. The other man was more distinguished, a retired army man, Emmie

thought, till she wondered if she were not accustomed to think that all gentlemanly looking men with grey moustaches and rather red cheeks were retired officers. She wondered why he was going to town . . . on business or pleasure. . . . He looked fidgetty.

And the woman. She was one of those women you couldn't read: might be anything. She was not richly dressed; her features were regular, and showed a general harmony.

Emmie had got her back to the engine and the other lady facing her said: "I am afraid I shall have to put this window up; it's too draughty."

"Certainly," said Emmie, and she thought, "What a nice voice! She's a lady!" And they began to talk.

Every now and again Emmie wanted to say: "You'll never guess what I'm going to do. . . . I'm going to be married . . . *to my husband!*"

The lady talked very nicely, and told Emmie a good deal of her history: her husband was a naval officer, and the little boy was going to school near London next term if he passed an examination which he was going in for. Her husband was at Hong Kong. . , . Naval officers were away a long time. . . .

And then, after much conversation, the commercial traveller (supposed) took off his cap, which he put in a bag, and put on his hat.

"We are near now, aren't we?" said Emmie.

"Be there in five minutes or so," said the man. Emmie began to feel very agitated. In five minutes she would meet Reginald again. She began to pull little ends straight — her lace collar, the lace at her cuffs. . . . She pulled her big hat to the proper angle.

The lady said: "Have you anybody to meet you?"

"Yes," said Emmie, wishing to say, "My husband,"

but a sort of healthy instinct for truth kept her from that.
"Have you?" she asked instead.

"No."

As Emmie got out of the carriage she looked about. Nobody. . . . He was not there. . . . Not there. . . .

"Emmie!"

She turned round.

"Oh!"

People looking after their luggage looked up to see these people of untender years greeting each other so warmly. One or two sympathised: the streams of age seemed robuster and deeper than the boisterous currents of youth, and love was not only for the young. The young seem inclined to mock.

"Darling," he whispered.

Emmie's chin was shaking. She looked at him with glistening eyes. He was greyer than she and slightly thinner than before. But he was still Reginald. The look in his eyes was Reginald's — the voice was the voice of old; the manner, too.

Emmie felt as if she could shut her eyes and picture a cliff on Blackpool beach.

"We must get away," he said, holding one of her hands in his as if he could not lose her. "Where's your luggage?"

A porter came up and soon they were in a cab.

Emmie looked at him again.

He put an arm round her shoulder.

"Were you glad to hear from me, Emmie?"

She nodded. There were tears on her cheeks — tears of happiness.

"I think I told you all. I scarcely hoped for this. It looked sometimes as if I might go first."

"Oh! . . . That!" She gasped.

"But I didn't."

"No."

"And now we are to be married. All's ready, and after the ceremony we go to Paris. You've scarcely changed, dear; you're just as beautiful as you always were and you're still Emmie . . . my Emmie."

He bent her face to him and kissed her again and again.

"This life has the most amazing surprises any man can think of. I meet you — I might never have met you, think of that. I meet you, marry you, leave you . . . and now I have you again, till death us do part."

Emmie looked at him a moment and then flung her arms round him and held him in a passionate embrace.

Just as the story of Reginald's leaving had travelled round street and fireside, so the tale of his return had a similar success, thus belying the fate of most sequels.

Tim told Ernest, who went about unable to do business all the morning. Then Grandpa heard it and as he was getting older he had to be told twice, and said, "Come back, has he? He's had a long holiday."

And when the Booke ladies got it they made a descent on Tim, who was polite and pleasant with his aunts, but could tell them nothing they desired to know. Everybody wanted to know, of course, why Mr. Tame went away, where he had been, and what he had been doing.

Emmie wrote letters from Paris to her parents and relations telling of her reunion with her husband, and begging that neither he nor she may be asked questions about the past.

Miss Booke looked at Mrs. Holten and sniffed at that. "Not ask questions. . . . What were they there for? What were they to do if they weren't to ask questions? Not ask questions indeed!"

Even in her letter Aunt Jane said that explanations were due to the family and, though outsiders might properly be put off, she trusted there would be no attempt made to leave her without a proper understanding of what had really happened. She must insist on that.

Reginald and Emmie, very happy in Paris, read the letter seriously and then comically.

"Bless her! She really thinks she ought to know," he said.

"But she won't," said Emmie.

"No, she won't. What will you say?"

"I shall just say, I won't tell you, Aunt Jane."

"And if she is offended?"

"Let her be. She'll think I'm in the wrong and most undutiful and all that, but it can't be helped."

Reginald laughed.

"She'll tackle me."

"And what will you say?"

"That since we don't want to tell, no nice people will want to ask."

Emmie chuckled.

"You'll be too polite for her."

They stayed in Paris a fortnight and during that time discussed their future. They would live in Ganton or near it. Emmie wanted to be not far from her children and they knew the Ganton people would receive Reginald again with a little chaffing and raillery, but satisfied that if his wife was content there was no reason for them to put on airs.

And there were plenty of years for Reginald and Emmie taking a general computation, and life offered them its flowers and fantasies. Reginald wanted to know all about the works, how the new machinery was

working, if A. B. & Co. still sent big orders, and if Canada and Japan were still good markets.

As they sat discussing matters at a café near the opera and noticed young, middle-aged, and old, all engaged in sipping at life and looking out upon it with a great curiosity or criticism, Reginald said: "Life's full of curious adventures, Emmie."

"Isn't it?"

"Has yours been as you pictured it when you were young?"

"Not a bit."

"Nor mine. I wonder is anybody's? It goes evenly: then there's a jerk. One goes along a plain, then climbs a precipice. . . . And so many people are the same. Occasionally we are apt to think that only certain people have really thrilling moments in their lives, only a few go over the Russian mountains, and for the rest it is, speaking generally, a humdrum existence." He shook his head. "If the tale of an average person could be written it would be full of depths and heights and thrills and excitements, with certain things in it we tell to nobody."

Emmie nodded. It was pleasant to hear him talk like this.

She seemed to be reminded of something. "I remember Aunt Maria once telling me I was just an average woman — do you think I am?"

"An average woman . . ." He shook his head. "Preposterous." Then he laid his hand on her's and a jolly look came into his eyes, which recalled to Emmie the times when he talked fantastically to the children. "An average woman . . ." he repeated. "To tell you the truth, dear, I don't believe there is such a person."







